



PALACE WOMEN
IN THE NORTHERN SONG
960-1126

女官

BY

PRISCILLA CHING CHUNG

Publication History

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FOREWORD

Historians are the prisoners of their sources. Only occasionally can they interview people with knowledge of the events about which they are writing. They must work from a partial, biased, and often tendentious record to piece together a coherent picture of the past. Nowhere is this problem more pervasive and serious than in the study of pre-modern China. The widespread use of printing in China from the 10th century on made possible the production of books in large numbers. As a result an abundance of materials have been preserved to our own times, but ironically printing has contributed to the biased character of our sources. When printing became inexpensive the preservation of manuscript materials became less important. So we are left with a printed record, and therefore are wholly in the hands of the persons who edited and selected what portions of the written record were to be preserved. These editors were almost exclusively educated male members of that high stratum of Chinese society which espoused the values of the political elite. Our record, even when it is not deliberately tendentious, is thus biased towards the male-dominated great tradition, and slights all other groups in Chinese society.

One of the most difficult tasks faced by historians, and one of the most important, is to squeeze from this biased record useful information about the kinds of people who were systematically ignored by the writers. Religious groups can be studied, at least in part, through their own literature. The job is more complicated when we attempt to understand some other groups. And yet the attempt must be made.

Priscilla Ching Chung, in this study of Northern Sung palace women, shows how an apparently unpromising body of materials can be exploited to throw new light on the role of palace women, a group until now largely undescribed. Dr. Chung is concerned to illuminate not only the characteristics of her subjects, how they entered the palace, their family backgrounds, and so on, but also to evaluate their role in the politics of the time. In the distribution of power within the central government just how significant a role was played by the imperial consorts? From what did they derive their powers? and how are their powers to be measured? How much prestige (as distinguished from political power) did such women have? And could their prestige be extended outward to encompass their families? How did male members of the regular (male) bureaucracy view female influence? What role did wet-nurses play? How powerful were the female regents of Sung times?

In seeking answers to these questions Dr. Chung begins by describing succinctly but in detail the palace women's organization which handled women's affairs. Here, and here alone in the Sung government, were offices staffed by female officials. Many aspects of the daily needs of palace women—their food, clothing, housing, etc.—were dealt with by this organization. Numbering personnel in the thousands it mirrored the male bureaucracy in structure and practice.

This palace women's organization existed primarily to serve the needs of the empresses and imperial consorts. Dr. Chung describes the organization of this harem before going on to discuss the methods of entering palace service, and retirement policies. Some women, of course, entered at the top of the pyramid, by marrying the emperor or emperor-to-be either as principal or secondary consorts. In most such cases the women were not the personal choices of the royal men themselves but of the empress dowagers or the then reigning emperors. They thus might marry men who not only felt no affection for them but actually resented their presence. They might suffer the fate of Meng-shih, principal consort of Che-tsung, picked for him by Empress Dowager Kao. Meng-shih was promptly deposed by the emperor after his mother died. At times though, women so chosen gained the initial tolerance and eventual affection of their imperial husbands.

A small number of women entered the imperial palace by being summoned from service in the palace women's organization. Of the women studied by Dr. Chung about 10 percent, or half the number who married in, entered the palace in this way.

Presumably most of the thousands of women who served in the palace women's organization had been recruited by procedures akin to those used under later Chinese dynasties. Recruitment of girls from the general population was a practice that dated at least from the Han, and continued down to the end of the empire. Unfortunately there appears to be no description of the recruitment process for the Sung. Incidental references do suggest that girls were brought into service while still young (twelve or thirteen) and that they did not have to come from official families.

Many of the imperial women, as might be expected, did come from civil official backgrounds. What is more striking is the number who came from military families. The principal consort of Ying-tsung may serve as an example. Descended on her mother's side from one of chief military leaders of the early part of the dynasty, she was also on her father's side the descendant of a military family. This penchant for alliances with families of military bent is particularly intriguing given the general opinion that the Sung was most civilian oriented of the major dynasties.

Other women became companions of emperors without benefit

of impressive family connections. Liu-shih, a favorite of Emperor Hui-tsung, was the daughter of a wine seller; another powerful consort during the Southern Sung was the daughter of a retired palace musician.

Once she entered the palace services, unless she had the extraordinary good fortune to attract the emperor's attention, a girl could look forward only to a comfortable but thoroughly cloistered life. The aged and unnoted palace woman is almost a stock character of Chinese poetry. However, occasionally and irregularly excess palace women were sent back into the larger society, often to be married off with dowries provided by the imperial treasury.

By careful use of at times rather colorless sources Dr. Chung provides a needed picture of the structure and functioning of this important part of Sung governmental institutions. The problems she faced in using her materials for this part of her work had rather to do with inadequacy of sources than with inaccuracy. When she moves on to assess the power and influence of palace women she faces difficulties of a different order. Chinese traditional historians, as male members of the elite, had a strong vested interest in ignoring, belittling, or castigating examples of female influence and power. Where the power of a woman was so patent that it could not be obscured the sources portraying it must be used with care to avoid passing on the biases of the historians. Where the role of a woman was less obtrusive, information on her power must be deduced from various sorts of indirect evidence. Taking promotions as one possible index of a woman's influence Dr. Chung describes in detail the various factors that contributed to women's advancement. Age, relationship to influential figures, personal talents, family background, and of course the attitudes of the emperors all affected the promotions of their women. Dr. Chung also comments at length on palace women's attempts to use their positions to aid their relatives. At times a family raised from obscurity because one of its girls attracted the attention of the emperor might maintain its new elite position for generations. The most extreme example, and no doubt an unrepresentative one, was a girl who entered palace service in the late tenth century, whose family, hitherto obscure, continued to serve the Sung as officials into the 13th century. But even less fortunate families could benefit legally from the new status of their daughters in palace service.

Certain close relatives of the grand empress dowagers, the empress dowagers, and the empress herself were accorded the legal privilege called Deliberation, which specified that before the legal officers could even begin considering a case they had first to obtain the permission of the emperor. And it would seem that men so benefited could themselves legally extend some protection to their

close relatives. The situation is made less clear by rules saying that imperial women were not supposed to extend their protection to their relatives, but we know that at least at some times imperial women could in practice aid their relatives, by securing for them honorary offices on the occasions of certain ceremonies

Finally Dr. Chung provides a summary of the role of female regents in the direct exercise of political power. During the Northern Sung some female regents served because the new emperors were too young to rule in person. Emperor Che-tsung, for example, was only nine when he succeeded his father in 1085. His grandmother, Grand Empress Dowager Kao, dominated the government for the next eight years. Other regents, such as Empress Dowager Ts'ao, ruled because the emperor was too ill to attend to affairs of state. And finally regents might be used, as on the sudden death of Che-tsung, when arrangements for succession had not been made beforehand. The characters and abilities of these Northern Sung regents varied. Some exercised direct and vigorous rule. Others sought only to preserve the status quo until the throne could be properly filled. But, remarkably, the female regents of this era have generally been given high marks by Chinese historians. Indeed many Sung calamities are blamed on those succeeding emperors who failed to follow the sensible policies of the regents. These accolades are the more remarkable in light of the traditional prejudices of the historians.

Dr. Chung's study is most immediately and most obviously of interest and use to Sung specialists. For students of political history it throws a new light on the important question of the relationship of "inner and outer"—the palace figures (women, eunuchs, and imperial relatives) and the bureaucrats. Her study also illuminates the role of the military in Sung politics in an interesting fashion. The recent work of Edmund Worthy on the founding of the dynasty has highlighted the role of things military during the early reigns. Dr. Chung's study suggests that this connection with the military extended into the later part of the Northern Sung. Does this not suggest a long-term policy of the imperial family?

The marriage patterns reflected in the study also suggest one of the ways in which the line of enquiry opened up here might be extended. There are also materials available on other imperial relatives. Perhaps an examination of marriage patterns of imperial princes and princesses would throw still more illuminating light on Sung society. Such studies might also be extended into the Southern Sung, or to other dynasties. Within the Sung an examination of the ideology surrounding marriage (as seen by literate male members of the elite) might be gleaned from the various books of family advice. How do these ideals square with the social practices revealed in the

biographies?

In sum, Dr. Chung has succeeded in throwing light on a subject of concern not only to students of Chinese society and government but also to those with a more general interest in the largely hidden role of women in the creation of the Chinese past. Let us hope that this work will be followed by others which will place the questions raised in a comparative framework, to the further benefit of us all.

Prof. Brian E. McKnight

University of Hawaii, Manoa

PREFACE

In imperial China women worked in the palaces as serving women and palace officials. Others held positions as imperial consorts and empresses. These women were graded like male officials and even had their own judicial system responsible for law and order within the palaces. This study will examine the institutionalized nature of palace service. It will assess the political power and social prestige of palace women by examining the bureaucracy's attitude toward them, the power of wet nurses, power to secure positions, the extension of power to imperial relatives, and the direct rule of female regents. Having done so, it will proceed to evaluate the palace women's occupational role and the impact of this upon their family members in terms of wealth, style of life, kinship connections, educational opportunities, and related factors that determine social prestige.

Since a knowledge of the social organization of palace women is essential to any understanding of the role played by these women, a study was made of all Chinese encyclopedias dealing with the sources of the institution of palace women as well as with the origin of the titles of female officials and imperial women. The Sung structure of the palace women's social organization was found outlined in the section entitled *nei-chih* (inner duties) in the *Sung hui-yao chi-kao* (A digest of governmental institutions of the Sung dynasty). Comparison of this structure was made with that in the T'ang as depicted by Robert des Rotours in *Traité des fonctionnaires et traité de l'armée*. It was then found that the Sung had not made major changes with the structure of palace women except for a reduction in the size of the harem and minor adjustments with respect to titles. The job descriptions of many of the offices remained constant (see Appendix I).

Although meticulous records of the affairs of female personnel appear to have been kept, little from them was incorporated into official history and is therefore not available for this study. Perhaps someday these records will be found but for the present time discussions concerning the structure must necessarily be limited to available material. To flesh out the basic structure, records on 92 imperial women in the Northern Sung were studied. These women were either listed in historical records as wives of the nine Northern Sung emperors or were indicated as such in the edicts of promotion in *Sung ta-chao-ling chi* (a collection of imperial edicts of the Sung dynasty). Biographies of these women were written and whenever relevant information was found, it was incorporated into this study.

After exploring the social organization of palace women, this work will examine the methods of entry into palace service, demonstrating that mechanisms existed by which ambitious families could place their women-folk into the palace using several different available means of entry. This is important, for if it can be shown that families were anxious to place their daughters into palace service, that in itself will serve to indicate the prestige and power attached to palace positions. This study does not pretend to enumerate every method of entry into palace service used during the Sung period, but attempts rather to reconstruct some of the principal means used. Indices to historical documents as well as to private collections dealing with medieval China were scrutinized to find writings dealing with the topic of recruitment of women into palace service. Nothing was found regarding the recruitment of women from the general populace during the Sung, but information concerning recruitment during the Ming and Ch'ing periods is available. This was gathered as a basic reference on how recruitment might have operated in the Sung. It is possible that the topic of recruitment did not come up for discussion in the Sung because no major problems associated with it arose. During the Ming and Ch'ing, on the other hand, the restrictive measures imposed on palace women caused a great deal of dissatisfaction among the general populace and this anxiety may have generated discussions on the topic of recruitment. These findings were then collated with those gleaned from memorials to the emperors—giving the official view of how recruitment should be conducted from the bureaucracy's perspective—and from biographies of harem women. Charts on the methods of entry of palace women are in Appendix II.

The best sources for studying the career developments of palace women are the official biographies of *hou-fei* (empresses and consorts) in the *Sung-shih* (*History of the Sung*), *Tung-tu shih-lüeh* (compilation of events and occurrences of the Northern Sung), *Sung-jen i-shih* (collection of anecdotes about Sung personalities), *Huang Sung shih-ch'ao kang-yao* (essentials of the ten reigns of the Sung) and the like. The shortcoming inherent in dependence on these sources is that they contain biographies of selected women—those who were considered important by historians for inclusion in documentation—and who, therefore, represent only the tip of the iceberg. However, since these are the only available sources, it is necessary to rely on them for information from which we may deduce the conditions for the advancements of palace women in general. A possible future avenue for research on this topic is the study of all local histories of the Northern Sung period as a source of information for less significant women. Detailed breakdowns of conditions for advancement of wives

of each of the nine emperors are in Appendix III.

I hope that this work, despite its limitations, will add to the storehouse of knowledge about the history and accomplishments of women. For although the study of China has made great strides in the West, systematic study of the role of women in Chinese society is only beginning to gain legitimacy. Many established scholars still consider a knowledge of this history of women irrelevant to the understanding of Chinese institutions. Study of women in Chinese history has, therefore, engaged the time and interest of few male historians and has been, for the most part, the interest of a new generation of female scholars. With the study of women as yet in an embryonic stage, primary and secondary sources are not readily available and methodology not yet developed. The researcher is compelled to work with a combination of scanty historical records, poetry, short stories, and novels. This is because until comparatively recent times, few women have left records of themselves. They remain as shadowy creatures whose role was to breed, nurture, and nourish. It was only when a woman stepped out of her ascribed role, scandalizing her contemporaries, that she managed to appear in historical records. Even if a woman held a powerful position she is much more likely to be remembered if her actions, particularly her sexual actions, shocked her contemporaries. Simply being an empress was not enough, it was the scandalous conduct in her position as empress that counted for more. This is why Empress Wu of T'ang has fascinated scholars more with her sexual life than with her impressive accomplishments as reigning monarch.

I wish to express my thanks to Professor Robert M. Hartwell of the University of Pennsylvania for his guidance in both my education and research. Sincere appreciation and thanks also go to the other members of the University faculty, Professors Adele A. Rickett and Michael Zuckermann, in particular, who have read and have given invaluable suggestions on the initial drafts. I am especially indebted to Professor Brian E. McKnight of the University of Hawaii at Manoa for his careful readings of the final drafts of the manuscript. I wish to thank him for his encouragement, his helpful suggestions, and his recommendation of the book for publication. I would also like to thank both Professor Rex Wade and Professor Daniel W. Y. Kwok for obtaining support services for my research and writing at the Department of History at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

To my family, I owe special gratitude for their consideration and support. I dedicated this book to my husband, Stanley M. K. Chung, M.D. (now deceased), and to our two sons, Christopher and Anthony. This work would not have been possible without their continued understanding and tolerance. Last, but not least, I would

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ABBREVIATIONS

CCTI	<i>Chu-ch'en tsou-i</i>
CPLC	<i>Ch'ing-pai lei-ch'ao kuan-wei-lei</i>
CTKCTSCC	<i>Ch'in-ting ku-chin t'u-shu chi-ch'eng</i>
HTCTCCP	<i>Hsü Tzü-chih t'ung-chien ch'ang-pien</i>
HTCTCCPCSPM	<i>Hsü Tzü-chih t'ung-chien ch'ang-pien chi-shi pen-mo</i>
HTKTT	<i>Hua-tang-ko ts'ung-t'an</i>
HSCCKY	<i>Huang Sung shih-ch'ao kang-yao</i>
KCSWK	<i>Ku-chin shih-wu k'ao</i>
KKP	<i>K'ao-ku pien</i>
LPC	<i>Lung-p'ing-chi</i>
M	<i>Morohashü's Dai kan-wa jiten</i>
SHY	<i>Sung-hui yao chi-kao</i>
SJIS	<i>Sung-jen i-shih</i>
SPHCPNKMPY	<i>Sung-pen huang-ch'ao pien-nien kang-mu pei-yao</i>
SS	<i>Sung-shih</i>
SSCSPM	<i>Sung-shih chi-shih pen-mo</i>
SSHP	<i>Sung-shih hsin-pien</i>
STCLC	<i>Sung ta-chao-ling chi</i>
STCCS	<i>Sung-tai cheng-chiao shih</i>
STJWYFC	<i>Sung-tai jen-wu yii feng-ch'i</i>
SWCY	<i>Sung-wu chi-yuan</i>
TTSL	<i>Tung-tu shih-lüeh</i>
YHPPI	<i>Yeh-huo pien pu-i</i>

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The Chinese imperial court was, for many centuries, the locus of power and prestige. This was due to the fact that formally the emperor's word was law and unquestionable although in reality, his power was often limited. Strong-willed emperors managed to break the power of their ministers and rule directly exercising absolute power while weak-willed ones tended to become virtual prisoners of their own bureaucracy.¹ Since all power wielded by central government was personified by the emperor, access to his person was vital to any ambitious Chinese family or individual. Historically, the Chinese court was divided into two groups, often of conflicting interests, but both fighting either to share in or gain access to the power embodied in the emperor. There was the outer court (*wai-kung*) consisting of ministers and advisors, as well as military officers; and the inner court (*nei-kung*) comprising imperial children and the emperor's more "personal" attendants, eunuchs and palace women. While the outer court has been the subject of much discussion, the inner court, particularly palace women as a group, has received little attention.²

Traditionally, historians have looked only at the sensual role of palace women. Rather than study these women in their official capacities, historians have seen them only as objects whose sole purpose was to satisfy the emperor's lust. Consequently, palace women have remained shadowy creatures whose role was to serve and entertain. This will be the first major work to examine, in detail, not only empresses and concubines, but also female officials within the palace—women who engaged in career services in the official governmental structure. We will see that the Chinese took the institutionalized nature of palace service most seriously, organizing the women under six bureaus patterned on the six boards of the civil service and grading female officials like male officials. There was even a judicial system, modeled on the censorate, responsible for law and order within the palace.

The importance of this career for women was recognized by Chinese families who frequently placed their daughters in palace service. This was especially true of impoverished official families who were unable to arrange good marriages. A career within the palaces was thus an option for women and an alternative to marriage. Many women were able to rise high within its administrative structure.

Chinese women have worked in this way in the public domain since legendary history, with an impact on the present development of female status within China which should not be underestimated.

The period of this study is the Northern Sung (960-1126). Historians today see this era as one of the crucial transitional periods in Chinese history, when widespread social, economic, and intellectual changes took place, shaping much of the subsequent nature of Chinese society down to the twentieth century.³ Although Northern Sung China was continuously pressured by "barbarian" invasions from the north and west—resulting in the loss of north China to the Chin (1115-1234) in 1126—it was also a time of economic growth with advances in agriculture, paralleled by technological and quantitative developments in the handicraft and industrial sectors of the economy. This agricultural and industrial progress stimulated improvements in the techniques and organization of water transport, increased internal and overseas trade, spurred the evolution of monetary and credit systems, and gave rise to commercial cities.⁴ Culturally, the Northern Sung was responsible for the development of neo-Confucianism—a blending of Buddhist ideas and traditional Confucianism.⁵

During the time of these developments the Chao family ruled for 166 years over the Northern Sung empire. These Sung emperors traced their ancestry to Chao Yin in the T'ang dynasty (618-906). (His grave, facing eighteen peaks, was said to prophesize the future reigns of eighteen emperors of the Sung dynasty.) His distant descendant, Chao Shih-yin (c. 920), fathered the two men who were to become the first and second emperors of the Northern Sung. The clan name of the Sung imperial family—Chao—did not appear in the annals of China until the Chou. It was in the reign of King Mu (c.1159 B.C.) that Tsao-fu, the prime ancestor of the clan, was made the earl of the municipality of the Chao (Chao-ch'en) in Shan-si. From then on, Tsao-fu adopted the Chinese character "Chao" as his family name and became the first ancestor of the clan. When China became unified under the Ch'in, the Chao ruler was ousted from his domain and from that time on the Chao clan was dispersed all over China. Some of the clan members gained recognition at various times throughout history.⁶

Of the nine emperors who reigned during the Northern Sung, the first two were brothers who had worked together to conquer and consolidate the empire. Four were sons of preceding emperors—two born of principal consorts and the other two of secondary ones. Two succeeded their elder brothers who had died without heirs, and one was adopted. One of the emperors had a brief reign because of illness and another reigned for only a few months because of the Chin invasion; the other seven had long reigns ranging from 15 to 41 years. Three emperors began their reigns under the regencies of empress

dowagers.

The important role women played in Northern Sung politics was made possible by the founding emperor, T'ai-tsu - Chao K'uang-yin (928-976). T'ai-tsu removed the eunuchs as the women's chief competitors for power by instituting a policy forbidding eunuchs to participate in politics and ensuring that their position should always remain that of servants. He further increased the importance of women by using marriage alliances to consolidate his power.

K'uang-yin had risen to power during the chaotic struggles of the Five Dynasties period (907-960) by serving the Latter Chou (951-960) emperor in the elite Palace Corps. The emperor died in 959 leaving as heir a boy of six. K'uang-yin's rise to power culminated in the famous incident at the Bridge of Ch'en when his army invested him with the yellow robe, symbol of imperial authority. When he returned to the capital at the head of the army, the empress dowager, as regent, bowed to the inevitable and she and the boy emperor abdicated. K'uang-yin assumed the title as the first emperor of the new Sung dynasty and moved the capital eastward to Kaifeng. On ascending the throne, the new emperor conciliated the civil officials by restoring the dominant position of the civilian element in government, curbed the power of his rivals by retiring the army that raised him to the throne, and ensured peace by sparing the fallen family members of the Latter Chou and stipulating that under no circumstances should government officials such as cabinet ministers and censors be executed.⁷

Chao K'uang-i (939-997), the second Sung emperor, was first made a regional commandant,⁸ but, being as ambitious as his brother, he was not satisfied with anything less than the throne. When the first Sung emperor died K'uang-i set aside his nephew, the heir-apparent, and ascended the throne as Emperor T'ai-tsung.

According to historical records, the succession of T'ai-tsung to the throne of his brother was in accordance with the wishes of their mother who had requested that her younger son succeed the older one. She supposedly said to T'ai-tsu, "The only reason you are on the throne today is because the late emperor of the Latter Chou foolishly named a young child as his successor. If you are succeeded by a child, our dynasty will suffer the fate that we meted out to them." She then stipulated that the throne was to be handed down from T'ai-tsu to T'ai-tsung, to another younger brother (Chao K'uang-mei), then back to the son of the founding emperor. Despite this official account, popular opinion felt that T'ai-tsung had in fact murdered his brother and usurped the throne.

T'ai-tsung was not succeeded by his younger brother. Instead, he declared that the brother was only the son of a wet nurse. He then

ordered the suicide of his nephew, son and heir of the founding emperor. His own son was named heir-apparent. His actions were said to have been counseled by Chao P'u (c.922-993) who said that T'ai-tsu had erred in following the mother's wishes and that T'ai-tsung should not repeat this error in succession by passing over his own son.⁹

T'ai-tsung was succeeded by his third son since the heir-apparent had become insane. Emperor Chen-tsung (968-1022) was born of a secondary wife whom he posthumously named empress dowager. The sanity of the third emperor was often questioned since he frequently claimed to have received heavenly missives and divine messengers. Toward the end of his 25-year reign, he became so ill that his empress was the de facto ruler.¹⁰

The fourth emperor, Jen-tsung (1010-1063), was the sixth and only surviving son of Chen-tsung. He was born of a female official but at birth was claimed as the natural son of Liu-shih (1) (969-1033) who was then established empress because she was the mother of the heir-apparent. Succeeding to the throne at the age of 12, Jen-tsung began his 41-year reign under the regency of his foster mother, the empress dowager. After her death, he learned of the identity of his natural mother whom he then posthumously named empress dowager. Jen-tsung, like his father, was plagued by the need of a male heir to the throne. His principal wife finally convinced him to adopt the son of a cousin. The adopted heir, a boy of four, was placed under the guardianship of the empress.¹¹

Ying-tsung (1032-1067), the fifth emperor, was the 13th son of the great grandson of Emperor T'ai-tsung and the son of Jen-tsung's first cousin. Because of his adopted father's long reign, he did not succeed to the throne until he was 32. Since he was in poor health, his adopted mother co-ruled behind the lowered screen. Four years later, Ying-tsung died leaving a 19-year-old son as heir.¹²

The sixth emperor, Shen-tsung (1048-1085), was the eldest son of Emperor Ying-tsung and his principal consort. During his 18-year reign, the policies of the Northern Sung underwent revolutionary changes. Conservative ministers were dismissed, while Wang An-shih (1021-1086) and his innovators dominated the court. The emperor and his trusted ministers called for a broad program of institutional reforms directed toward changing fiscal, economic, and bureaucratic practices. These changes were most controversial and as a result, Shen-tsung listened, almost daily, to bitter denunciations and diatribes against his ministers and the policies which he himself had authorized. Above all, his own mother was against his policies. After ruling for 18 years, Shen-tsung died leaving a boy of nine as heir and his own mother as regent with a free hand to reverse all of his policies.¹³

The seventh emperor, Che-tsung (1076-1100), the sixth son of Shen-tsung, began his 15-year reign under the regency of his grandmother, who recalled the conservatives and restored the opponents of Wang An-shih to power. At her death, Shen-tsung's principal consort was named regent, but the emperor had no intention of tolerating another regency and the empress dowager was forced to resign three months later. Resenting the oppressive powers of his grandmother and the ministers with whom she had surrounded him, the young emperor degraded and exiled the conservatives, returned the followers of Wang An-shih to power, and conferred the chief ministry upon an ardent disciple of Wang An-shih.¹⁴

Hui-tsung (1082-1135), the eighth emperor, was half-brother to the preceding emperor who died without an heir. He was chosen by the empress dowager, and during the first three months of rule he remained under her regency. As emperor, Hui-tsung continued the policies of his brother keeping the advocates of reform in power. Since Hui-tsung was partial to Taoism, under his rule the government became increasingly identified with the Taoists, upon whom they depended for support. This exacerbated the conflict between conservatives and reformers as the chief councilor, depending on the continued favor of the emperor, found it necessary to conform to the latter's Taoist predilections. While in the Sung the conservatives and reformers contended for power, north of the border the Chin (1115-1234) was rapidly conquering the Khitan state of Liao (907-1125), the northern neighbor of the Sung empire. Unfortunately Sung statesmen, engrossed in their own political infighting, paid insufficient attention to this development and made inadequate preparations against the new northern enemy.

Hui-tsung, not realizing the danger the rise of the warlike Chin portended, welcomed a change which might destroy the state of Liao, terminate the subsidy which the Sung was paying, and provide the empire with an opportunity to recover lost territories. He allied the Sung with the Jurchens to attack the Liao. This policy might have been successful had the Sung empire possessed the military strength to fulfill its commitments and thus demonstrate its ability to sustain a campaign against the Chin. But the empire had been at peace for more than a century. The army was untrained, had no experience of war, and lacked capable commanders. Under these circumstances, Sung armies were defeated by the Liao. The Chin, having conquered the Liao without significant Sung assistance, turned on the Sung. While the Chin cavalry poured over the frontier and swept down to the capital, Hui-tsung abdicated.¹⁵

Ch'in-tsung (1100-1162), the last emperor of the Northern Sung, was the eldest son of Hui-tsung and his principal consort. After the

abdication of his father, Ch'in-tsung became emperor at the age of twenty-six and ruled for less than a year. On ascending the throne, he hastily concluded a treaty with the Jurchen, paying a huge ransom to redeem lost lands. Trying to regain lost prestige at a most chaotic time, he listened to ministers who counseled breaking the pact he had just made, and so the Chin forces returned, defeated the Sung armies, besieged the capital, and captured the two emperors and the entire court.¹⁶

Of the 166 years of the Northern Sung, 25-½ years were under the rule of female regents who exercised sovereign power. Although this represents only 15.36% of the Northern Sung era, these years include some of the most trying times of the period. These female rulers so distinguished themselves that Chinese historians, who traditionally condemned female influence in government, attributing national calamities to their interference, praised the five Northern Sung regents for their talent and merit. Instead of blaming the disasters of the time on these women, historians blamed the emperors' failure to continue the policies of the regents. Thus, problems encountered by Emperor Che-tsung were said to be due to his having betrayed the policies of Empress Dowager Kao (r. 1085-1093); the loss of the empire was blamed on Emperor Hui-tsung who reversed the administrative policies of Empress Dowager Hsiang (r. 1100); while the successful establishment of the Southern Sung was ascribed to Empress Dowager Meng (r. 1127, 1129-1131) who rallied and solidified support for Emperor Kao-tsung (1107-1189), enabling the Chao imperial house to rule for another 150 years.¹⁷

Chapter 2

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF PALACE WOMEN

Women within the palaces fell into three general categories: 1) imperial women in the harem, 2) their daughters, and 3) personal attendants. This study will be limited to women brought into the palaces—harem women and female attendants—and will not deal with imperial princesses born within the palace walls.

The existence of imperial women in the harem can be traced to legendary history. According to the *Book of History*,¹ the dawn of Chinese history began with the Five Emperors. The most famous of the legendary emperors was the Yellow Emperor (?2698-2498 B.C.), who was said to have had a principal consort and three secondary ones.² The existence of female personal attendants is noted in historical records throughout Chinese history. The earliest reference to women working in the palaces can be found in the *Rites of Chou* (Chou-c.1122-249 B.C.).³ Since the Chinese regarded utopia as having existed in antiquity, they strove to preserve the practices, rites, and institutions of the past. This penchant for adherence to precedence accounts, perhaps, for the perpetuation of the employment of women in the palaces despite the growth of strength and efficiency of the eunuch system in later times.

Female officials, their assistants, and staff attended to the needs of imperial women within the palaces. Recruited from respectable families (liang-chia) within the populace, they were educated and trained to perform their duties properly. These women, because of their proximity and access to the emperor and his favorites, were able to secure favors for themselves, and on promotion to the harem, for their families. In some instances, women in the harem accumulated so much power they were able to challenge and even usurp the power of the throne.

Although China did not have a written Salic Law expressly forbidding women from inheriting the throne, there was an unwritten law that a woman was not to become emperor.⁴ All rulers, throughout legendary and written history, passed their thrones to either sons or adopted sons and never to daughters. Despite the unwritten law, in two instances—one legendary and the other historical—women actually ruled as emperors. The legendary instance concerned Nü Wa (c. 2938 B.C.), a woman with a human head and the body of a

serpent, who succeeded her brother.⁵ The second instance occurred in medieval China when Empress Wu-hou (r. 685-705) of T'ang changed the dynastic name to Chou and assumed for herself the title of Holy Emperor. She ruled with a firm hand for 15 years, securing peace at home and awing the troublesome frontier tribes. Although her contemporaries and people of later times considered her a usurper, in the confusion of the ensuing reign her once-dreaded name was often mentioned with regret.⁶

While there were at the most only two female emperors, there were numerous instances of empresses ruling as regents. The position of regent was the highest to which a woman could aspire. No written law sanctioned regencies of empresses, yet actual cases occurred beginning with the wife of the founder of the Han dynasty (202 B.C.-220 A.D.) who, after the death of her husband, usurped all powers and ruled as regent until her own death.⁷ The dominant person at the close of Chinese imperial history was another female ruler, Empress Dowager Tz'u-Hsi (r. 1861-1889), the most important political figure in China for the last 40 years of the Ch'ing dynasty (1644-1912).⁸ This type of regency has a history of 2,000 years. Despite the absence of written law, regencies became customary through practice and the establishment of precedent.

The existence of female rulers as regents leads to questions about the backgrounds of palace women and the circumstances that led to their rise to power. Since imperial princesses were barred from inheriting the throne, the only women who could attain the position of female rulers were those accepted into the imperial house. Who were these women? Were they promoted from the ranks of palace women or were they obtained expressly as empresses and groomed for the possibility of ruling as regents? We will see that although four of the five Northern Sung regents were descended from official families, Empress Dowager Liu (r. 1022-1033), one of the two most powerful female rulers of the period, was not.

Undoubtedly, these five Northern Sung regents enjoyed differing degrees of social prestige and political power in their roles as rulers, but were these same privileges shared by their less-fortunate contemporaries in the inner palaces? Did other palace women also possess some degree of social prestige and political power?

Social prestige and political power are interlinked. Social prestige signifies the attribution of superiority or inferiority among persons and can be measured by social deference. This is because the granting of deference is a voluntary submission of privileges by others to those who are perceived as possessing a greater degree of social worthiness. Since power is an important element of prestige, it is necessary to first determine if palace women possessed it. Having

accomplished that task, one can then proceed to assess their occupational roles, wealth, style of life, kinship connections, and related factors that determine social prestige.

Power, or more specifically political power, is the capacity for achieving goals in the social or political systems; that is to say, the capacity for obtaining honors and advancements for oneself, one's family, as well as one's allies. Negatively, political power is the capacity for removing one's enemies from power or the ability to thwart their wishes by maintaining one's position in the face of their opposition. The extent of the palace women's political power can be assessed by examining their effectiveness in these two areas.⁹

A clear understanding of the social organization of palace women and their methods of entry into the palace must necessarily underlie any assessment of their political power and social prestige. The social organization of palace women was divided into two distinct structures. The first was the service organization consisting of serving women and their officials. The second was the organization of imperial women composed of women in the emperor's harem. Although separate and distinct, there was movement between the two structures as indicated by studies of biographies of harem women in the Northern Sung.

Movement between the two structures existed throughout the Northern Sung. Indeed, 73 of the 92 imperial women studied—over 80 percent—were promoted from the service organization. With the exception of the first and last emperors, all of the others acquired women for their harems from the service organization. The high percentage of promotion from the service organization indicates that working in the palaces did provide a degree of access or exposure to the emperor which was advantageous to the women. But although the promotion rate in the harem appears high, the rate of promotion from the service organization at any one time was actually low. Memorials to the emperors show that there were two to three thousand women in the palaces at any one time.¹⁰ Therefore, if one were to take the eighth reign as an example (when 18 out of 19 wives, 94.7%, were promoted from the service organization) one finds that only 18 out of 2,000-3,000 palace women were fortunate enough to catch the emperor's eye and be promoted into the harem. The promotion rate from the service organization during that particular reign was then 18/2-3,000. The following chart shows the promotion of women from the service organizations in each of the nine reigns of the Northern Sung.

Emperors	No. of wives	No. promoted from service organization	%	Remarks
T'ai-tsu	3	none		
T'ia-tsung	14	10	71	one became empress
Chen-tsung	12	8	67	two became empress dowagers, one ruled for 11 years
Jen-tsung	16	14	88	two became empresses posthumously
Ying-tsung	4	3	75	all were titled by later emperors
Che-tsung	9	8	89	one became empress
Hui-tsung	19	18	95	three became empress—two posthu- mously named by husbands; the third named by son
Ch'in-tsung	1	none		

Because of movement between the two structures, these two organizations went hand in hand even in the Chinese mind. We find frequent mingling of the two classes of persons in source materials, sometimes finding references to female officials set apart from imperial women, but, more frequently, finding information on female officials included in sections on imperial women. Female officials were often promoted into the imperial women's organization and imperial children were born of palace women. The high percentage of promotion of women from the service organization into the harem suggests both that the emperor had little access to women outside the palaces and that some serving women, because of the nature of their work, had access to the emperor and were able to put this advantage to good use in their advancement to high positions.¹¹

The Palace Women's Service Organization

Memorials to the emperors reveal that some members of the Chinese bureaucracy felt the palace women population was too large, that they were overly favored by the emperor, and that they were overpaid for their services. These memorials asked that more women be retired from palace service and that the court should return to the practice of the founding emperor when a minimum of serving women and female officials was employed. The officials moreover felt that palace women maintained too good a communication linkage with their families and friends in the outside world. Two memorials were found complaining of the traffic, noise, and confusion at the gates of the inner palaces and advising the emperor that palace women, their relatives, and friends not be permitted to freely enter and leave the palace.¹²

The service organization, consisting of all female personnel, was administered by female officials in charge of all affairs concerning

women. This women's organization, existing in conjunction with the eunuch organization appears to have served as a buffer between the imperial women and eunuchs. These women served as personal attendants to imperial consorts and princesses. They looked after all personal and ceremonial needs of imperial women; their education, guests, audiences, mail, documents, wardrobes, jewelry, security, cooking, ceremonial vessels, food and wine, medicinal affairs, living quarters, chariots, gardens, and the like.

This service organization, under the reign of Emperor Chen-tsung, was a revised model of the one that existed in the T'ang. The structure, evolved from earlier dynasties, can be traced as far back as the Ch'in and remained relatively unchanged through the Ming (1368-1644).¹³ Women were recruited from the general populace as well as from official families to staff positions within the service organization.

According to a memorial written in 1041, there were between 2,000-3,000 palace women in the service organization. Another memorial, written in 1052, states that in the time of the founding emperor there were only 200-300 (so we can see that the number has increased tenfold). Their wages also appear to have increased 200 times since the T'ang.¹⁴ However, no exact information on the number of palace personnel nor their exact remuneration according to rank can be found.

Chiao-shih pi-ch'eng (penned annals of Chiao) tells us that the administrative structure of the service organization was patterned on the six boards of the Chinese bureaucracy and was divided into six bureaus called the *liu-shang*. *Heading the six bureaus was the Supreme-commander-of-the-palace. This position was created by Chen-tsung especially to honor the Chief-of-surveillance, Shao-shih, for her many years of faithful service. This position was made superior to that of the two Chiefs-of-services who had previously headed the administrative structure. These officials were responsible for directing the imperial women in the harem as well as for the correct functioning of all six bureaus. In addition, they were in direct charge of the first bureau, the Bureau of General Affairs.*¹⁵

In the Northern Sung the six bureaus were:¹⁶

1. The Bureau of General Affairs—headed by two Chiefs-of-services supervising a staff of 58.
2. The Bureau of Rites and Etiquette—headed by two Chiefs-of-rites-and-etiquette supervising a staff of 48.
3. The Bureau of Clothing—headed by two Chiefs-of-clothing supervising a staff of 36.
4. The Bureau of Food and Wine—headed by two Chiefs-of-food-

and-wine supervising a staff of 42.

5. The Bureau of Apartments—headed by two Chiefs-of-apartments supervising a staff of 34.
6. The Bureau of Work—headed by two Chiefs-of-work supervising a staff of 44.

Chart 1

The Administrative Structure

Supreme commander (*kung-ssu-ling*)

Bureau of General Affairs	Bureau of Rites & Etiquette	Bureau of Clothing	Bureau of Food & Wine	Bureau of Apartments	Bureau of Work	Office of Surveillance
2 Chiefs-of- services (<i>shang-kung</i>)	2 Chiefs-of- rites-&- etiquette (<i>shang-i</i>)	2 Chiefs-of- clothing (<i>shang-fu</i>)	2 Chiefs-of- food-&- wine (<i>shang-shih</i>)	2 Chiefs-of- apartments (<i>shang-ch'in</i>)	2 Chiefs-of- work (<i>shang-kung</i>)	2 Chiefs-of- surveillance (<i>kung-cheng</i>) 2 Directors-of- surveillance (<i>ssu-cheng</i>) 4 Intendants-of- surveillance (<i>tien-cheng</i>) 4 Clerks (<i>nü-shih</i>)

1. *Bureau of General Affairs*

This bureau was in charge of all affairs affecting palace women dealing with incoming and outgoing written materials, mail, transmission of orders and proclamations, keeping personnel registers, personnel remuneration, and the like. In addition, it was also responsible for the traffic of persons to the inner palaces. The bureau was divided into four departments: records, transmission of orders, personnel, and gatekeeping.

The Department of Records had charge of all mail, books, and documents.¹⁷ The Department of Transmission of Orders was in charge of all orders, proclamations, and edicts that affected female personnel. For example, women were permitted visits from their families and special edicts had to be issued if specific persons were to be barred from the inner places.¹⁸ The Department of Personnel had charge of registers of palace women, their pay according to rank, and other administrative duties. Although no records are available regarding the exact pay of different office holders, it can be assumed that women were paid in accordance with their ranking. It is, however, not known if the amounts were comparable to their male counterparts in civil service. Palace women were also given special

payments of gifts whenever they gave birth to an imperial offspring.¹⁹
The Department of Gatekeeping was in charge of palace women's visitors.²⁰

Chart 2
Bureau of General Affairs
2 Chiefs-of-services

2 Directors (<i>ssu-chi</i>)	2 Directors (<i>ssu-yen</i>)	2 Directors (<i>ssu-pu</i>)	6 Directors (<i>ssu-wei</i>)
in charge of all in/outgoing written materials	in charge of all orders & proclamations concerning women	in charge of all registers, remuneration, etc.	in charge of all in/outflow of persons to the inner palaces
2 Intendants (<i>tien-chi</i>)	2 Intendants (<i>tien-yen</i>)	2 Intendants (<i>tien-pu</i>)	6 Intendants (<i>tien-wei</i>)
2 Supervisors (<i>chang-chi</i>)	2 Supervisors (<i>chang-yen</i>)	2 Supervisors (<i>chang-pu</i>)	6 Supervisors (<i>chang-wei</i>)
6 Clerks	6 Clerks	6 Clerks	4 Clerks

2. Bureau of Rites and Etiquette

This bureau was in charge of all affairs concerning rites, etiquette, and daily living procedures within the palaces dealing with education, music, audiences and visits with imperial women, processional order, etc. The bureau was divided into four departments: education, music, audiences and visits, and ceremonies.

The Department of Education was responsible for teaching, the acquisition of classical texts, writing implements, desks, and other support services. Little detail is available regarding the exact texts used but it can be assumed that since the palace conducted special recruitments for literate women with skill in numbers, writing and working with numbers were probably deemed desirable and taught to the female personnel.²¹ The Department of Music was in charge of music, musicians, and related matters.²² The Department of Guests had responsibility for all visitors, audiences, guiding, etc.²³ The Department of Ceremony was in charge of processional order, setting up of tablets of insignia, ceremonial bows, and the like. There were special rules regarding etiquette for women. For example, women did not have to kneel in court like men. Emperor T'ai-tsu was puzzled by this difference and asked his courtiers to research the question and it was found that women did kneel in court until the early T'ang when Empress Wu mandated that they need only bow.²⁴

Chart 3

Bureau of Rites & Etiquette

2 Chiefs-of-rites-&-etiquette

2 Directors (<i>ssu-chi</i>)	4 Directors (<i>ssu-yüeh</i>)	2 Directors (<i>ssu-pin</i>)	2 Directors (<i>ssu-lsan</i>)
in charge of classical texts, teaching, acquisition of writing implements, etc.	in charge of music & related matters	in charge of guests, audiences, guiding, etc.	in charge of processional order, ceremonial bows, etc.
2 Intendants (<i>tien-chi</i>)	4 Intendants (<i>tien-yüeh</i>)	2 Intendants (<i>tien-pin</i>)	2 Intendants (<i>tien-lsan</i>)
2 Supervisors (<i>chang-chi</i>)	2 Supervisors (<i>chang-chi</i>)	2 Supervisors (<i>chang-pin</i>)	2 Supervisors (<i>chang-lsan</i>)
6 Clerks	2 Clerks	2 Clerks	2 Clerks 2 Recorders (<i>t'ung'shih</i>)

3. *The Bureau of Clothing*

This bureau was in charge of all clothing, vestments, ornaments, jewelry, soaps, towels, as well as the security of the inner palaces. The bureau was divided into four departments: jewelry, clothing, adornments, and security.

The Department of Jewelry was in charge of all paintings, jewelry, jade tallies of authority, etc.²⁵ The Department of Clothing was responsible for garments as well as trimming and ornaments.²⁶ The Department of Adornments had charge of soaps, towels, combs, bathrobes, and personal adornments.²⁷ The Department of Security had to protect all of the valuables for which this bureau was responsible and had charge of guard duties, defense weapons, and related matters.²⁸

Chart 4
Bureau of Clothing
2 Chiefs-of-clothing

2 Directors (<i>ssu-pao</i>)	2 Directors (<i>ssu-i</i>)	2 Directors (<i>ssu-shih</i>)	2 Directors (<i>ssu-chang</i>)
in charge of paintings, jewelry, tallies of authority, etc.	in charge of clothing, ornaments, etc.	in charge of soaps, towels, robes, combs, etc.	in charge of guard duties, defense weapons, etc.
2 Intendants (<i>tien-pao</i>)	2 Intendants (<i>tien-i</i>)	2 Intendants (<i>tien-shih</i>)	2 Intendants (<i>tien-chang</i>)
2 Supervisors (<i>chang-pao</i>)	2 Supervisors (<i>chang-i</i>)	2 Supervisors (<i>chang-shih</i>)	2 Supervisors (<i>chang-chang</i>)
4 Clerks	4 Clerks	2 Clerks	2 Clerks

4. The Bureau of Food and Wine

This bureau was in charge of the supervision, preparation, serving, and tasting of imperial meals. It was divided into four departments: utensils, wines, medicine, and cooking.

The Department of Utensils was responsible for banquet and sacrificial plates, dishes, utensils, and vessels.²⁹ The Department of Wines had charge of wines and spirits for the inner palaces.³⁰ The Department of Medicine was responsible for all medicinal affairs concerning palace women. Occasionally, if a favored woman was ill, the emperor might call in a male physician. For example, in 963, when the empress became ill and did not respond to treatments given her within the palace, Emperor T'ai-tsu summoned a male physician who prescribed medication. Unfortunately, her condition deteriorated and the bereaved emperor blamed her death on the physician and had him banished.³¹ The Department of Cooking had charge of the preparation of food for palace personnel. Apparently, the emperor decided which woman's chamber he preferred to dine in and she then directed the cooking staff to prepare a meal to please him. This can be illustrated by an example from the Southern Sung when Emperor Ning-tsung (r. 1194-1224), on the death of his principal consort, was trying to decide which one of his two favorite wives he should name empress. The emperor asked each of them to prepare a banquet for him, and said that his decision would be made on the basis of the woman who pleased him the most.³²

Chart 5
Bureau of Food & Wine
2 Chiefs-of-food-&-wine

2 Directors (<i>ssu-shan</i>)	2 Directors (<i>ssu-yün</i>)	2 Directors (<i>ssu-yao</i>)	2 Directors (<i>ssu-ch'ih</i>)
in charge of cooking & ceremonial utensils	in charge of wine & liquor	in charge of medicinal affairs	in charge of food & firewood, etc.
4 Intendants (<i>tien-shan</i>)	2 Intendants (<i>tien-yün</i>)	2 Intendants (<i>tien-yao</i>)	2 Intendants (<i>tien-ch'ih</i>)
4 Supervisors (<i>chang-shan</i>)	2 Supervisors (<i>chang-yün</i>)	2 Supervisors (<i>chang-yao</i>)	2 Supervisors (<i>chang-ch'ih</i>)
4 Clerks	2 Clerks	4 Clerks	4 Clerks

5. Bureau of Apartments

This bureau was responsible for the interior arrangements of the inner palaces, for chariots, gardens, lanterns, and the like. It was divided into four departments: interior arrangements, chariots, parks, and lighting.

The Department of Interior Arrangements had charge over beds, screens, nets, pillows, blankets, mats, sweeping, mopping, etc.³³ The Department of Chariots was responsible for chariots, umbrellas, fans, and the like.³⁴ The Department of Parks was in charge of palace gardens, parks, the cultivation of vegetables and fruits.³⁵ The Department of Lighting had charge of lanterns, lamps, candles, kerosene, etc.³⁶

*Bureau of Apartments**2 Chiefs-of-apartments*

2 Directors (<i>ssu-she</i>)	2 Directors (<i>ssu-yü</i>)	2 Directors (<i>ssu-yüan</i>)	2 Directors (<i>ssu-teng</i>)
in charge of interior arrangements, beds, screens, sweeping, etc.	in charge of chariots, umbrellas, fans, etc.	in charge of gardens, parks, flowers, vegetables, etc.	in charge of lanterns, kerosene, candles, etc.
2 Intendants (<i>tien-she</i>)	2 Intendants (<i>tien-yü</i>)	2 Intendants (<i>tien-yüan</i>)	2 Intendants (<i>tien-teng</i>)
2 Supervisors (<i>chang-she</i>)	2 Supervisors (<i>chang-yü</i>)	2 Supervisors (<i>chang-yüan</i>)	2 Supervisors (<i>chang-teng</i>)
4 Clerks	2 Clerks	2 Clerks	2 Clerks

6. Bureau of Work

This bureau was in charge of making clothing for palace women and had jurisdiction over fabrics and the distribution of clothing and miscellaneous items. The bureau was divided into four departments: manufacture, precious trimming, fabrics, and distribution.

The Department of Manufacture had charge of sewing all clothing for palace women. Since the palace provided all the clothing for palace women, specific types of clothing had to be made for the different ranks.³⁷ The Department of Precious Trimmings was responsible for gold, jade, and precious stones for decoration on women's clothing.³⁸ The Department of Fabrics was in charge of dyes, silks, brocades, and hemp for the making of clothes.³⁹ The Department of Distribution was responsible for the distribution of clothing, firewood, coal, food, drinks, and miscellaneous items throughout the inner palaces.⁴⁰

Chart 7
Bureau of Work
2 Chiefs-of-work

2 Directors (<i>ssu-chih</i>)	2 Directors (<i>ssu-chên</i>)	2 Directors (<i>ssu-ts'ai</i>)	2 Directors (<i>ssu-chi</i>)
in charge of sewing all clothes	in charge of gold, jade for trimming on clothes	in charge of fabrics & dyes	in charge of distribu- tion of miscellaneous items
2 Intendants (<i>tien-chih</i>)	2 Intendants (<i>tien-chên</i>)	2 Intendants (<i>tien-ts'ai</i>)	2 Intendants (<i>tien-chi</i>)
2 Supervisors (<i>chang-chih</i>)	2 Supervisors (<i>chang-chên</i>)	2 Supervisors (<i>chang-ts'ai</i>)	2 Supervisors (<i>chang-chi</i>)
4 Clerks	6 Clerks	4 Clerks	4 Clerks

Independent of the six bureaus was a separate and special office responsible for the correct deportment of all palace women. The duties of this Office of Surveillance were analogous to the Censorate. It was responsible for the correction of errors, exposition of shortcomings, and recommendation of punishment.⁴¹

To summarize, the administrative structure of the women's service organization within the inner palaces of the Northern Sung was headed by the supreme commander, twelve chiefs-of-services, and a chief-of-surveillance. Assisting these high ranking officials were 56 directors, 60 intendants, 54 supervisors, and 94 clerks and recorders. Within the inner palaces, there was then a total of 279 positions for female officials. Most of the positions originated in the Han⁴² and during the Northern Sung the positions were graded equal to those held by men within the civil service. These positions were filled by capable women recruited into the palaces. These women were then trained to staff positions within a hierarchy with an established system of promotion and retirement.

Organization of Imperial Women

The organization of imperial women was modeled on the Chinese concept of the heavenly palace. It was believed that four stars surrounded the heavenly emperor—the brightest was the empress star and the remaining three were secondary consort stars. According to some sources, the practice of the emperor having four wives was introduced by the son of the Yellow Emperor who patterned the empress-consort system on the four legendary stars. Other sources attribute the origin of the system to the Yellow Emperor himself who supposedly had a principal consort and three secondary consorts.⁴³

The idea of this empress-consort system was reinforced by the

Chinese fascination with numbers. Emperors of China traditionally had four consorts in accordance with the immutable law of nature as four was considered a sacred number symbolizing the four cardinal points. By including the emperor, the number came to five, a number that was also considered sacred. Both numbers were thought to have mystical significance symbolizing the entire universe, and by taking four consorts—each of whom represented a cardinal point—the emperor could regard the entire world as his domain.⁴⁴

According to the Chinese, the numbers three and nine were also mystical as they denoted the ultimate limit of numbers in general. Furthermore, multiplication was thought to denote an unbreakable union, which in this case, probably referred to the relationship between man and woman. By multiplying three by three—which was thought to be pregnant with infinity—one begets nine which meant infinity. The magic of these numbers, the Chinese hoped, would bring them an infinite number of progeny. Thus it was said, "If one married nine women at one time one would have more children." For this reason, three groups of three (nine) wives were added in the Hsia (? 2205-1766 B.C.) era; and since three and nine were both sacred numbers, three groups of nine (27) wives were added in the Yin (? 1766-1122 B.C.); finally, another three groups of 27 (81) wives were added. Consequently, Chou (1122-249 B.C.) rulers supposedly had one empress, three consorts, nine concubines, 27 mistresses, and 81 paramours, totaling 121 wives.⁴⁵

Although the imperial consort system described above was an idealized one and not a factual one, it provided the model for the next 700 years. The Ch'in (221-207 B.C.), having unified China, adopted the title *huang* for the emperor in order to distinguish the Ch'in rulers, who governed over unified China, from the Chou feudal rulers. The emperor's principal consort from that time on was addressed as *huang-hou*. Sui Yang-ti (r. 589-604) added to the existing positions by creating an extra one for his favorite wife⁴⁶ and from then on the empress-consort system became one where there were five highest ranking wives instead of four—totalling 122.

The T'ang system, inherited by the Northern Sung, provided 122 positions for harem women. The T'ang emperors probably did not fill all of the positions but the titles were available. The Northern Sung emperors found this system too cumbersome and revised it. The second Sung emperor abolished the 81 paramour positions and the third emperor further trimmed the total number to 24.⁴⁷ (See charts 8 and 9).

Historical records show that Northern Sung emperors did not fill all of the 24 positions within the revised system. Although the founding emperor had the least number of wives, subsequent

emperors acquired increasingly larger number of harem women. Of the nine emperors under study, four had less than ten wives while five had more than ten. Of the emperors who had less than ten wives, T'ai-tsu had three, each of whom was acquired as a principal consort after the death of the previous one. Thus, he had, in reality, one wife at a time. Ying-tsung had four wives, but three of those were awarded harem titles after the Emperor's death. Che-tsung had nine wives but only two held imperial titles during the Emperor's lifetime, while the last Northern Sung emperor, Ch'in-tsung, had only one wife, his principal consort.

Of the five emperors who had more than ten wives, T'ai-tsung had thirteen, Chen-tsung had twelve, Jen-tsung had seventeen, Shen-tsung had fourteen, while Hui-tsung had nineteen. Although both T'ai-tsung and Jen-tsung appear to have had a large number of wives, in reality, they did not have more than four or five living wives at any particular period of life. The seemingly large number of wives was due to turnover because of death or dismissal. The motivating force behind the large number of wives for both Chen-tsung and Jen-tsung lay in the need for an heir to the throne.

The principal consort —

Empress (*huang-hou*)

The secondary consorts (*fei*), graded 1a —

Noble Consort (*kuei-fei*)

Pure Consort (*shu-fei*)

Virtuous Consort (*ts-fei*)

Worthy Consort (*hsien-fei*)

The nine concubines, graded 2a —

One of Luminous Deportment (*chao-i*)

One of Luminous Countenance (*chao-jung*)

One of Luminous Beauty (*chao-yüan*)

One of Cultivated Deportment (*hsiu-i*)

One of Cultivated Countenance (*hsiu-jung*)

One of Cultivated Beauty (*hsiu-yüan*)

One of Fulfilled Deportment (*ts'ung-i*)

One of Fulfilled Countenance (*ts'ung-jung*)

One of Fulfilled Beauty (*ts'ung-yüan*)

The 27 mistresses had been reduced to 18 and divided into three categories, nine positions for the first one, graded 3a —

Fair and Handsome One (*chieh-yü*)

four positions for the second, graded 4a —

Beautiful One (*mei-jen*)

five positions for the third, graded 5a —

Talented One (*ts'ai-jen*)

The 81 paramours were divided into three groups of 27 positions, the first was graded 6a —

Ladies of the Jewelled Grove (*pao-lin*)

The second, graded 7a —

Imperial Ladies (*yü-nü*)

the third, graded 8a —

Merry Ladies (*ts'ai-nü*)

The principal consort —

Empress (*huang-hou*)

The secondary consorts (*fei*), graded 1a —

Noble Consort (*kuei-fei*), 1a(i)

Pure Consort (*shu-fei*), 1a(ii)

Virtuous Consort (*te-fei*), 1a(iii)

Worthy Consort (*hsien-fei*), 1a(iv)

Titles reserved for wives of previous emperors —

Supreme Consort (*t'ai-fei*)

One of Supreme Department (*t'ai-i*)

One of Noble Department (*kuei-i*)

Titles of minor wives, graded 1b —

One of Pure Department (*shu-i*), 1b(i)

One of Pure Countenance (*shu-jung*), 1b(ii)

One of Obedient Department (*shun-i*), 1b(iii)

One of Obedient Countenance (*shun-jung*), 1b(iv)

One of Beautiful Department (*yüan-i*), 1b(v)

One of Beautiful Countenance (*yüan-jung*), 1b(vi)

Titles of minor wives, graded 2a —

One of Luminous Department (*chao-i*), 2a(i)

One of Luminous Countenance (*chao-jung*), 2a(ii)

One of Luminous Beauty (*chao-yüan*), 2a(iii)

One of Cultivated Department (*hsiu-i*), 2a(iv)

One of Cultivated Countenance (*hsiu-jung*), 2a(v)

One of Cultivated Beauty (*hsiu-yüan*), 2a(vi)

One of Fulfilled Department (*ts'ung-i*), 2a(vii)

One of Fulfilled Countenance (*ts'ung-jung*), 2a(viii)

One of Fulfilled Beauty (*ts'ung-yüan*), 2a(ix)

Title of minor wife, graded 3a —

Fair and Handsome One (*chieh-yü*)

Title of minor wife, graded 4a —

Beautiful One (*mai-jen*)

Titles of minor wives, graded 5a —

Talented One (*ts'ai-jen*), 5a(i)

Noble One (*kuei-jen*), 5a(ii)

The need for an heir was an important problem for the Northern Sung. Infant mortality in those days took its toll on the imperial children as well as those of the general populace. Three of the nine emperors of the Northern Sung had no heirs. Two were succeeded by their younger brothers, while the other one was an only surviving son who, having no heir of his own, was forced to adopt the son of a cousin as heir. Excluding the founding emperor (whose son was set aside by the emperor's younger brother), only three emperors were not faced with the problem of the need for an heir. They were: T'ai-tsung, Shen-tsung, and Hui-tsung. T'ai-tsung had nine sons, seven of whom grew to maturity; Shen-tsung had fourteen sons, five of whom survived; while Hui-tsung had thirty-one sons, twenty-five of whom survived to maturity.

No reason could be found for the large number of wives accumulated by Shen-tsung and Hui-tsung. Shen-tsung had fourteen wives and twenty-two children. During his reign he conferred harem titles on nine of his wives, double that of his predecessors. One reason for the large number may be due to the lack of one dominant lover as in the cases of the lives of Chen-tsung and Jen-tsung. Thus, his access to other women was not obstructed. Since Shen-tsung's principal consort eventually outlived him, he had only one empress during his lifetime. The other two women who attained empress status did so posthumously when their sons became emperors. Two women were conferred imperial consort status by Shen-tsung (one was the mother of the heir-apparent). The other six wives who held official harem titles were minor ones subsequently advanced by the two succeeding emperors.

The emperor with the largest number of wives was Hui-tsung. If any of the Northern Sung emperors was to fit the stereotyped image of Chinese sovereign surrounded by a bevy of wives, it would be him. According to historical records, Hui-tsung had nineteen wives, twenty-nine sons, and thirty-four daughters. Not only did he have more wives and children than any of his predecessors, he also had more titles conferred upon his women. As we have seen, all of the Northern Sung emperors conferred some titles upon their wives but succeeding emperors were responsible for titles for the rest. Hui-tsung, on the other hand, conferred titles on his wives annually (from the first year of his reign until 1118 when he skipped a year, then continued for another two years). In 1122, he demoted an imperial consort to commoner status. From that time on until his abdication, Hui-tsung, perhaps due to his political troubles, ceased conferring titles on palace women. Since the Emperor was so generous with titles for his wives, more than one living woman would be holding the same title. For example, in 1103, there were two "Talented Ones;" in 1104, two

"Beautiful Ones" and two "Talented Ones;" in 1107, there were two "Fair and Handsome Ones" and two "Noble Consorts," and so forth.

An important question concerning the palace women's organization is its degree of independence and its relationship to the eunuch organization. Unfortunately, this question cannot be fully answered with the presently available historical material. Sources regarding the structure of palace women make no mention of eunuchs; it is as if the eunuchs did not exist. Similarly, sources regarding the structure of the eunuch organization make no mention of palace women. This possibly indicates a complete separation of the two organizations in the minds of the Chinese with the eunuchs dealing with the males in the palaces while female personnel served imperial women.

This is not to say that conspiracies between eunuchs and women did not exist during the Northern Sung. Indeed, the wife of T'ai-tsung plotted unsuccessfully with a eunuch to set aside the heir-apparent,⁴⁸ and the powerful Empress Liu successfully usurped the powers of the ailing Emperor Chen-tsung with the aid of eunuchs.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the eunuchs caused so much dissension between Emperor Ying-tsung and his regent that the censors banished the intriguing eunuchs from court.⁵⁰ Although the Sung eunuchs were involved in court politics, they were kept from attaining power by being banned from participation in central government. They were placed under the jurisdiction of the Chief Councilor and made accountable to civil government. The Northern Sung thus attempted to restrain the power of eunuchs by placing them within this chain of command. This method was so successful that Ming officials commended the eunuch organization in the Sung as the best in Chinese history.

Chapter 3

RECRUITMENT AND RETIREMENT

The study of historical documents and private collections sheds little light on the various means of entry into palace service that must have existed in the Northern Sung. The method of recruitment of palace women from among the general populace was used since mention of it was found in memorials to the emperor but the exact procedure was not described. Materials from the [Ming and Ch'ing were, therefore, pieced together for a look at how the Northern Sung process might have operated. The most valuable information on methods of entry during the Northern Sung was gleaned from biographies of the 92 imperial women.](#)

During the Ming and Ch'ing, only prostitutes and women with theatrical backgrounds were specifically excluded from recruitment into palace service but we do not know if this was true for the Northern Sung. A memorial to the emperor, in 1041, asked that five factors—decorum in demeanor, seeing, speaking, hearing, and thinking—be considered in the selection of palace women.¹ Information from biographies of imperial women suggests at least four different means of entry: marriage as principal consort, marriage as secondary consort, via summons from the palace, and recruitment.²

1. Entry via marriage as principal consort

Of the 92 women listed officially as wives of the nine Northern Sung emperors, 14 (15.22%) entered in this manner. All were named empresses although the ones who died before their husbands ascended the throne were titled posthumously. Since entry via marriage as principal consort immediately entitled a woman to the position of empress, this was the most viable method for advancement to high rank.

The selection of a woman as principal consort was a most important task and several memorials were written on this subject. These memorials discussed the acquisition of an empress in general terms, stressing the importance of choosing an empress on the basis of merit and not on the basis of beauty. One memorial specifically attacked the use of divination for selecting an empress since the date and time of the emperor's birth was common knowledge which made

it easy for an ambitious family to fabricate data for divination purposes. The memorials also discussed the necessity of educating the women selected since principal consorts had to assist the emperor in affairs of state. Another memorial, written in 1090, specifically listed four factors to be considered in the acquisition of an empress. It said that the search for an empress was important as it meant finding a mother for the people. The candidate, therefore, had to possess four qualities: good family background—she had to be of aristocratic stock as her family would become the in-laws of the emperor as well as the ancestors of future emperors; feminine virtue—this trait was important since the mother had to exert the proper kind of influence on her son, the future emperor; an abundance of correctness of behavior—this woman would be set up as an example to all women and had to behave correctly; the capability of holding extensive discussions with ministers—in assisting the emperor in his rule, she had to be able to discuss matters of state with the officials.³

Examination of marriage patterns of all nine emperors of the Northern Sung indicates that principal consorts were chosen from families who had originated in the military service. The marriages were all alliances arranged by the parents or guardians of the emperors while they were princes. If a reigning emperor was widowed or if the empress was deposed, a principal consort was chosen by the emperor in consultation with the court. An emperor was not free to establish his favorite as empress without the concurrence of his ministers. No satisfactory answer was found as to why the imperial family intermarried predominantly with military families. One possible reason could be that this intermarriage pattern reflected practices of military families and, possibly, for civil service families. Further studies of marriage patterns are needed for verification.

An argument can also be made that the marriage pattern of the Sung emperors resulted from the pledge made by the founding emperor in an effort to consolidate his power. In his famous speech promising to align his family to that of families of the founding generals of the empire, he said,

"The life of man is short. Happiness is to have the wealth and means to enjoy life, and then to be able to leave the same prosperity to one's descendants. If you, my officers, will renounce your military authority, retire to the provinces, and choose there the best lands and most delightful dwelling-places, there to pass the rest of your lives in pleasure and peace until you die of old age, would this not be better than to live a life of peril and uncertainty? So that no shadow of suspicion shall remain between prince and ministers, we will ally our families by marriages, thus,

ruler and subject linked in friendship and amity, we will enjoy tranquility."⁴

Unfortunately, T'ai-tsu was not able to fulfill his promise. Perhaps the inheritance of the throne by his brother rather than by his son nullified his pledge. A preliminary study of biographies of founding generals shows only six of the 13 families ever intermarried with the imperial family (46.5%). Thus, it is not likely that the pledge was responsible for the marriage pattern of the nine emperors.⁵

Of the 14 women who entered the palace through marriage as principal consorts, three were wives of the founding emperor. Each of the three marriages appears to have been intricately related to the politics of the times and to T'ai-tsu's rise to power. The first, Ho-shih (928-958), was the daughter of friend and colleague of T'ai-tsu's father. The two fathers had served together in the palace guards of the Latter T'ang (923-936) and it seems only appropriate that two old friends of similar social ranking should arrange to be allied through marriage. The young couple was married in 944 when both were about 16. The marriage lasted 14 years until 958 when Ho-shih died at the age of 30. Two years later, the widower became emperor and posthumously named her empress.⁶

The second principal consort was the third daughter of Wang Yao (c. 941), regional commandant of Chang-te military prefecture. Wang Yao had originally served the emperor of the Latter Chin (936-947) and had risen through the ranks. Subsequently, he served under the Latter Han (947-950), and then under the second emperor of the Latter Chou (951-960), attaining the rank of regional commandant. Thus, the marriage between the ambitious Chao K'uang-yin and the daughter of another ambitious regional commandant was a suitable alliance between two powers during the chaotic Five Dynasties period. And so, in 959, the year after the death of his first wife, the future emperor took Wang-shih (1) (941-963) as his wife. When he ascended the throne the following year, she was proclaimed empress. Unfortunately, she became ill in 963 and died at the age of 24.⁷

After the death of his second principal consort, T'ai-tsu officially remained a widower for four years. In 967, Sung-shih (1) (951-995) and her mother went to the palace to offer their best wishes on the occasion of the emperor's birthday. On seeing the girl, the emperor decided to make her his third wife. The choice of Sung-shih as principal consort was a logical one. She was descended of a lineage more prominent than that of the founding emperor. Indeed, her grandmother was an imperial princess of the Latter T'ang, and her mother an imperial princess of the Latter Han. Her great-grandfather

had been a regional commandant and her grandfather a prefect. Her father had first served under the two Latter Han emperors but when the Latter Chou rose to power, he went over to the Chou forces. At the establishment of the Northern Sung, he changed his allegiance to Sung T'ai-tsu. At the time of her marriage, Sung-shih was only 17 while the emperor was 40. The marriage lasted eight years; in 976, her husband died and her brother-in-law ascended the throne. The young widowed empress lived in retirement until her own death at the age of 44.⁸

The next two women to enter the palace through marriage as principal consort were both wives of the second emperor and were both chosen for him by his older brother, T'ai-tsu. The first was Yin-shih (c.950) whose brother was a regional commandant who had begun his military career in the service of the Latter Chou and as such had been a colleague of Sung T'ai-tsu. The marriage, arranged by these two colleagues for their siblings, appears to have been a suitable alliance between two military families. Little is known about Yin-shih. She died young but was posthumously named empress when her husband became emperor.⁹

The second principal consort was the daughter of a Sung official and a descendant of an illustrious line of military officials. Her grandfather was an adopted son of Li K'o-yung (c.883), the father of the founder of the Latter T'ang, and was one of the first regional commandants named by the founding emperor. Subsequently he transferred his allegiance to the Latter Han and served as chief councilor. Her father, a shrewd politician, first served under the Latter T'ang and was even credited with saving his sovereign's life. Later he transferred his loyalty to the Chin ruling house and was made a regional commandant. As times changed, he married his younger daughter to the emperor of the Latter Chou and when she died he married a younger daughter to the same emperor.

The acquisition of the sister of a reigning empress for the wife of Chao K'uang-i must have been a great accomplishment for the ambitious older brother. The marriage lasted a period of almost 20 years until Fu-shih (941-975) died childless a year before her husband became emperor. When T'ai-tsung ascended the throne he named his second principal consort empress posthumously.¹⁰

The sixth and seventh women to enter the palace through marriage as principal consorts were the two wives of Chen-tsung. One was the eighth daughter of the founding general, P'an Mei (921-987). The marriage was arranged by the two fathers in 985. P'an Mei had served under the Latter Chou but had transferred his allegiance to Sung T'ai-tsu and was credited with drafting the inaugural proclamation. He had served under both of the Sung emperors and the choice of his daughter as principal consort for Chen-tsung appears

most suitable. Married to Chen-tsung while he was still a feudal prince, P'an-shih died childless at 22 before her husband became emperor. She was named empress posthumously in 997.¹¹

The next principal consort was the daughter of Kuo Shou-wen (d.989) who had been only 14 when his father died in battle. Sung T'ai-tsu took the boy under his wing and later assigned him to work under P'an Mei. Kuo died in battle against the Chin and his family became impoverished. On hearing this, T'ai-tsung summoned Kuo's daughter into the palace as principal consort for Chen-tsung. Since the girl was only 14 at the time, she did not formally enter the palace until two years later. When Chen-tsung became emperor, she was declared empress. After 16 years of marriage, she died at the age of 32.¹²

The next two women to enter palace service through marriage were both wives of Jen-tsung. The first was the daughter of the regional commandant, Kuo Chung-jen. She was selected by the Empress Dowager Liu (r.1022-1033) and was established empress at the age of 11. At that time the boy emperor was enamored of another palace woman but was forced to marry the girl chosen by his adopted mother. As soon as the regent died, Jen-tsung had the empress deposed.¹³ After the empress was deposed Jen-tsung tried to placate his ministers who were displeased by his precedent-setting action. Diplomatically, he chose the granddaughter of Ts'ao P'in as the next empress. Ts'ao P'in (930-999) had served under the Latter Chou sovereigns and was a foster son of the Noble Consort to the founder of the Latter Chou. Transferring his allegiance to Sung T'ai-tsu, Ts'ao served all the first three Sung emperors as commissioner of military affairs. Six of his sons served in various capacities under both Chen-tsung and Jen-tsung. Ts'ao P'in's daughter had also been summoned into the palace as a secondary wife for Chen-tsung.¹⁴

The next woman to enter the palace through marriage as principal consort was Kao-shih (2), the only principal consort to Ying-tsung. This woman was the daughter of the sister of Empress Dowager Ts'ao, the adopted mother of the emperor. Thus, she was descended on her mother's side from the illustrious lineage of Ts'ao P'in, while on her father's side she was descended of a military family—both her father and grandfather were regional commandants. Empress Kao, in turn, chose the principal consorts for both her son and grandson.¹⁵

Hsiang-shih, daughter-in-law of Empress Dowager Kao, was the only principal consort of Shen-tsung. Personally selected by her mother-in-law, she remained under the latter's control throughout most of her life. Hsiang-shih was from a prominent family—her great-grandfather had served as Chen-tsung's chief councilor and her father was a regional commandant. In 1067, Shen-tsung became emperor

and she was declared empress. When her husband passed away she was named empress dowager but her mother-in-law became the regent. When Hui-tsung succeeded to the throne, Hsiang-shih was named regent but she resigned three months later.¹⁶

Meng-shih, principal consort to Che-tsung, was the daughter of a regional commandant. Selected from over 100 candidates by Empress Dowager Kao to be the principal consort for her grandson, Meng-shih was greatly favored by both her mother-in-law and her grandmother-in-law. However, her husband was enamored of a secondary wife and had her deposed after the death of Empress Dowager Kao.¹⁷

Wang-shih (2), principal consort of Hui-tsung, was the daughter of a prefect and appears to have come from a less illustrious family than the other principal consorts. The discrepancy may be due to the fact that her husband was not the heir-apparent but accidentally succeeded to the throne when his brother died leaving no living heirs. Wang-shih (2) had been married to Hui-tsung in 1099, the year before he was chosen by the court to succeed his brother, and the criterion for her selection as principal consort to a feudal prince may not have been as stringent as that for wives of heirs-apparent.¹⁸

The last woman to enter the palace through marriage as principal consort was Chu-shih (6), principal consort to Ch'in-tsung. Daughter of a regional commandant, she was the personal choice of her father-in-law. Since the Northern Sung ended soon after her husband became emperor not much is known of her family background. She and her husband were both captured by the Chin and they both died in exile.¹⁹

2. Entry through marriage as secondary consort

Only two of the 92 (2.17%) imperial women entered the palace as secondary consorts. They were both wives of the second emperor and were both chosen for him by his brother, Sung T'ai-tsu. Both women were acquired because the principal consort was barren. The first was the natural mother of Chen-tsung. Daughter of a regional commandant, she successfully provided T'ai-tsung with two sons and two daughters. Originally, her elder son was named heir-apparent but he became insane and his brother was appointed in his place. Despite the fact that she had produced two sons, both of whom had been named heir-apparent, she was to receive no honors during her lifetime. When the empress died, the emperor chose to leave the position vacant rather than name the mother of his sons to the high post. Furthermore, her husband chose not to honor her in death either and it was not until her son became emperor that she was

posthumously named empress dowager.²⁰

The second woman also came from a military family. Her family had become prominent at the time of her grandfather who had supported the Latter T'ang and had died fighting the Khitans. Her father had gallantly served the Northern Sung and had been named assistant commissioner of military affairs but towards the end of his life he was sent to serve under founding general [Mu-jung Yen-chao](#) (d.963). During the campaign the soldiers under their command rioted, looting the villages. Since Mu-jung was a founding general, his assistant had to take the blame and was retired from active service. In 975, nine years after his death, T'ai-tsu made reparations to the family, cleared his name, and ordered his daughter married to T'ai-tsung as secondary consort. Named Empress Li Ming-te by her husband in 984, she was able to change the fortunes of her family by naming her brother and his son commissioner-councilors.²¹

3. Entry via summons from the palace

Eleven of the 92 (11.9%) imperial women were summoned into palace service. Four became empresses, six attained imperial consort status, and one was named a minor wife. Of these women, the first was summoned by Tai-tsung for her beauty, the next three were wives of Chen-tsung, five were summoned by Jen-tsung, and the last two were wives of Hui-tsung.

The woman summoned into T'ai-tsung's palace was [Tsang-shih](#) (d.1022). She was originally a palace woman in the service of Li Yü (936-978), king of the state of Southern Sung and a vassal of the founding emperor. Initially, this man had received high honors from the emperor but became increasingly alarmed as he observed the new emperor consolidate his power by annexing the various states. To prove his loyalty, Li changed the status of his kingdom to that of a province. This gesture was not sufficient to appease an emperor bent upon centralization and Li was summoned to court. Fearing for his life, Li declined, feigning illness and was finally brought to court as a prisoner. Eventually, Li was pardoned and allowed to live out the rest of his life stripped of all power. At his death, T'ai-tsung summoned the former's palace woman into his own palace.²²

The powerful regent, Empress Dowager [Liu-shih](#) (1) was the first woman summoned by Chen-tsung into his feudal palace. She was recommended to him by a silversmith who wanted to curry favor with the then governor of the capital, Kaifeng. The next two women were both from prominent families summoned after the death of the empress. One was the daughter of Ts'ao P'in and the other, the daughter of Shen Lün (909-986) who had been secretary to the

founding emperor during the latter's military career and had subsequently served as chief councilor to the first two emperors.²³

Four of the five women summoned into Jen-tsung's palace were sisters, orphans of an impoverished scholarly family. Both their father and grandfather were holders of the *chin-shih* degree while their maternal grandfather had been a grand preceptor. Unfortunately, their father died before he was able to take office, leaving behind an impoverished widow with four daughters and a son. Using family connections, their maternal grandmother arranged to have the four girls summoned into palace service. One of these Chang sisters later dominated the love of Jen-tsung and was posthumously named empress.²⁴ Another was named imperial consort by a subsequent emperor, a third was posthumously named imperial consort, while a fourth was not promoted beyond minor wife status although she had given birth to a son. The fifth woman summoned into Jen-tsung's palace was Yang-shih (2) (d.1072). She was related to the powerful Empress Liu and had entered into palace service under her patronage. At first Yang-shih (2) was able to win the emperor's favor, obtaining posthumous honors for her grandfather and five official positions for her uncles and brothers. After the death of her patron she was sent into the nunnery.²⁵

Liu-shih (4) (d. 1120) and Wei-shih (2) (d. 1159) were both recommended by men who wanted to curry favor with the palace. Liu-shih (4) was the daughter of a wine seller and had first served in the household of a regional commandant. Hearing her master praise her beauty, Hui-tsung summoned her into the palace where she was rapidly promoted to Noble Consort and when she died, he posthumously named her empress.²⁶ Wei-shih's master recommended her to the palace and it was said that she was destined for greatness because of an omen. Apparently, when she was brought to her master's bed for his pleasure she was unable to cooperate because she emitted water throughout the night. This story was probably fabricated to give Wei-shih a facade of virginity and to impart some semblance of the supernatural to her son, Kao-tsung (1107-1189), who had the difficult task of rallying support for himself as the first emperor of the Southern Sung dynasty. Captured by the Chin, Wei-shih was released in 1142 and lived with her son at the Southern Sung palace as empress dowager until her death at the age of 80.²⁷

In the course of this study two other instances of this means of entry into palace service came to light. The first woman was Fei-shih (d.c.966) better known to the Chinese as *Hua-jui fu-jen*. Originally the wife of Meng Ch'ang, king of Shu, she was summoned into the palace by the founding emperor after her husband's death. To have the favor of the emperor, however, was to be in a dangerous position because of

the jealousies involved. In Fei-shih's case, it was the jealousy of the emperor's brother that caused her death. T'ai-tsung, responsible for the death of another of his brother's mistresses, shot her dead at a hunt.²⁸ The second instance occurred in the Southern Sung, suggesting that the practice was continued into the second half of the Sung dynasty. The woman was the daughter of a retired palace musician. When the empress dowager, wife of Kao-tsung, heard that her favorite musician had died leaving behind an orphaned daughter, she summoned the child into the palace. The child grew up in the palace, obtained the favor of the emperor, and eventually ruled as regent for 10 years.²⁹

4. Entry through recruitment

The number of women entering the palace by this means is not known. Since the palace staff numbered two to three thousand, the majority must have entered in this manner. The other means discussed previously can account for the recruitment of only a small number of palace women. The mother of Che-tsung appears to have entered through recruitment process. An orphan, she was adopted by her stepfather and took his name. The date of her entry into palace service is not known but she was promoted through the ranks and her son was named emperor at the age of nine. Being a secondary consort she was not named empress dowager and received the title only after her death.³⁰

The practice of recruiting women from the general populace to staff the inner palaces can be traced back to the Han. Palace officials scoured the country searching for girls to fill set quotas. Unfortunately, no description of the recruitment process could be found in Sung collections; information was obtained from Ming and Ch'ing sources.

Little information is available regarding the set quotas for recruitment, and none can be found concerning the frequency with which the government recruited, nor the percentage that was rejected (at the final selection process) and returned to their homes. The available information shows that, during the Ming, the quotas could be either regional or national and could vary between 40 to 500; recruitments were apparently conducted whenever the need arose. Attrition of women at the palace was apparently due to illness, old age, death, or termination of service through release from palace duty. In the Ch'ing, recruitments for women occurred annually.³¹

During the reign of Sung T'ai-tsu, girls aged 12 or 13 were recruited. Sung officials memorialized asking that palace women be recruited from among girls of good family backgrounds, preferably from official families, and that they be strictly supervised.³² The

existence of these memorials suggests that palace women may not have been recruited from good family backgrounds or at least not exclusively from official families. During the Ming, recruitment of palace women were conducted, sometimes separately, for girls for general service work and for literate women—especially those versed in numbers—to fill positions as female officials within the administrative structure. These women were often taken against their will with their families helpless to prevent their recruitment. One could say that the process was the female counterpart of male corvee labor. It was recorded that whenever word leaked out that women were to be recruited panic would strike the populace as it was felt, in the Ming, that women in the palaces were treated worse than dogs. Parents would scurry about arranging marriages for their daughters without regard for the grooms' backgrounds. Stories abound about wealthy families marrying their daughters off to tinsmiths, bean curd vendors, and the like. One family was said to have arrived late for the wedding and found another family with their daughter there for the same purpose. A compromise was arrived at whereby both families married their daughters to the same groom. Whenever it was rumored that widows were to be recruited to chaperon the girls, families would also hastily marry off their widows despite the fact that Confucianism places a high regard on the chastity of widows.³³

The girls recruited were sent to the palace for the final selection. In the Ch'ing those recruited were tested on their embroidery, cleaning, and housekeeping skills. They were also scrutinized on their poise, behavior, and conduct. Those who did not pass the examination were returned home, meaning that the girls had the option of intentionally failing the examination if they did not want to serve. Those who passed were readied for the emperor's personal selection. The girls would enter the palace through a back door and after reaching the hall where the selection was to occur, lined up like strings of pearls. When the eunuchs announced that all was ready, the emperor would arrive to personally select the future palace women. Those selected had their names and family backgrounds recorded in the palace registers. The most able of those chosen were taught the regulations of the palace and trained to fill the ranks of female officials. The best looking ones served the empresses and imperial women while the remaining ones performed basic services and had no contact whatsoever with imperial persons.³⁴

In the Ch'ing, the girls lived in single rooms in dormitories, 10 to each, under the supervision of eunuchs and were exploited by the latter who made money off their charges. The eunuchs skimmed on the girls' food and frequently the meals were so poor that it could not be stomachached yet they would be saved and served repeatedly. The girls

were malnourished and soon lost their beauty but it was not noticeable since they wore beautiful clothing supplied by the palace. To earn extra money, the girls did embroidery but as the eunuchs were their only links with the outside world, both supplies and finished products passed through the latter's hands. As middlemen, the eunuchs reaped quick profits. If the families wanted to send messages or gifts to their daughters, they also had to bribe the eunuchs.³⁵

Although information from [Ming and Ch'ing collections](#) shows that the girls were mistreated and that the populace was not happy with having their daughters recruited, there is no evidence of this in the Northern Sung. Since much of the apprehension of Ming and Ch'ing times centers around fear of exploitation of the girls by eunuchs whose powers were strongly curtailed during the Northern Sung, the quality of life of Sung palace women was probably superior to that of later times. This same apprehension, therefore, may not have existed during the Northern Sung.

57 of the 92 (61.96%) imperial women under study are thought to have entered the palace through recruitment since nothing is known about their family backgrounds and their biographies do not suggest any other forms of entry. Five of the women became empresses. Two were named by their sons and two by their husbands. One was named by her friend, Empress Dowager Liu. 19 achieved imperial consort status through the birth of children, imperial favor, meritorious service, and other reasons which are not apparent.

5. Entry by unknown means—military family backgrounds

It is not clear why seven of the 92 (7.61%) women in this study were recruited. Since their fathers had held minor military positions, there may have been a special recruitment on that basis. Three of the seven became empress—one was posthumously named by her son, Jen-tsung; another was posthumously named empress by her husband; and the third was promoted to empress on the death of the principal consort. The remaining two women were never advanced beyond minor wife status.³⁶

These five different methods of entry inducted women from various backgrounds into palace service. We find women from illustrious lineages: women whose family members had served many emperors in important capacities. Women from the general populace were recruited into palace service in great numbers and even those from questionable backgrounds sometimes rose to high positions. It is interesting to note, however, that the only women from a scholarly

family background were the four orphaned girls who were placed into palace service because their family had become impoverished and was unable to properly provide for them. We do not find other daughters of degree holders, of persons such as Ssu-ma Kuang, Wang An-shih, and others. No reason can be found for this peculiarity. One can speculate that perhaps it was the custom for military families to intermarry. Or perhaps it was not acceptable for civil service and military families to marry into each other. Or perhaps, families with scholarly backgrounds did not feel it desirable to marry their daughters into the imperial family.³⁷

A breakdown of means of entry can be seen in the following Table. The breakdown shows that the most efficacious method of entry, the one that led to the highest position within the palace, was that of marriage as principal consort (100%). The only women who entered this way were daughters of powerful families. This avenue could also be a dangerous one, for although many of the women used this method successfully—three went on to rule as regents—two were deposed and banished to the nunnery. Both these unfortunate women were selected by regents that the husbands resented and as soon as the latter were freed from the regents' control, the wives were deposed.

Table 2
Methods of Entry into Palace Service

	<i>Ratio</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Ranks attained</i>
1. Marriage as principal consort	14/92	15.22	all empresses
2. Marriage as secondary consort	2/92	2.17	all empresses
3. Entry through summons	12/92	13.04	4 empresses 7 imperial consorts 1 minor wife
4. Possible recruitment	57/92	61.96	5 empresses 19 imperial consorts 33 minor wives
5. Unknowns means—military families	7/92	7.61	3 empresses 2 imperial consorts 2 minor wives

Retirement of Palace Women

Historically, the retirement of palace women from service can be traced to Han Wen-ti (r.179-156 B.C.). The emperor was said to have released the women after an unspecified period of time and commanded them to marry. Not enough data are available for a comprehensive study of this subject in the Northern Sung since only listings of dates and numbers of women released (Table 3)³⁸ can be

found. Information from the Ch'ing shows that women who did general service work were released at the age of 25 while those who served imperial persons were retired after an additional 10 years.³⁹ Female officials, on the other hand, had no specified retirement ages. Presumably, they were retired when they became too old to be useful. The released women were married off with dowries provided by the palace. Because of their having served the emperor, these women were to be given the places of honor within their new homes and were supposedly superior to their commoner husbands. Unfortunately, many men married these women for their dowries alone and did not treat them with honor. Some men even sold their "honored wives" into prostitution.⁴⁰ Whether this was also true in the Northern Sung is not known.

Table 3
Releases of Palace Women

<i>Released by</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Number of Women</i>
T'ai-tsu	972	over 50
T'ai-tsung		unknown
Chen-tsung	997	unknown #
	1008	120
	1015	184
Jen-tsung	1039	278
	1059 (summer)	214
	(fall)	236
Ying-tsung	1064	135
	1065	180
Shen-tsung		unknown
Che-tsung	1095	91
	1097	24
Hui-tsung	1100	69
	1102	76
	1104	62
	1108	77
	1110	486
	1111	80
	1112	83
	1113	279
	1114	68
	1115	50
	1116	600
	1117	68
	1118	78
Ch'in-tsung		unknown

Northern Sung records show women were more often released in large numbers. Each emperor decreed the number of women to be released at a specific time. There was no apparent pattern to the releases since they were done at irregular intervals (Table 4)⁴¹ and not done in accordance with dates of military or economic crises. Three of

the releases occurred immediately upon the assumption of power of the emperors, suggesting an inclination to change the palace population with new emperors. There is no record of releases of palace women by three other emperors—T'ai-tsung, Shen-tsung, and Ch'in-tsung. Hui-tsung, on the other hand, released women frequently—almost annually. His action appears to be in tune with his reputation as a great lover and he might have changed the palace women population frequently to ensure the maintenance of a young and lovely staff.

Table 4
Release intervals

interval	years
1st	25
2nd	11
3rd	7
4th	24
5th	20
6th	0.5
7th	5
8th	1
9th	30
10th	2
11th	3
12th	2
13th	2
14th	4
15th	1
16th	1
17th	1
18th	1
19th	1
20th	1
21st	1
22nd	1

Although memorials were written to the emperors appealing for the release of palace women, the emperors apparently paid them no

heed since the dates of releases did not closely follow the dates of the memorials. For example, a memorial was written asking for the release of women for fiscal reasons in 1041 but no recorded release took place until 1059—eighteen years later. Another memorial on the same subject was written in 1068 but the next recorded release took place 27 years later.⁴² The long intervals between recorded releases—ranging up to 30 years—suggest that private, informal releases of individual palace women must have taken place. This is supported by certain memorials asking for the release of specific women.⁴³ Individual releases of palace women probably occurred in order to facilitate marrying off palace women at acceptable ages.

Female palace service personnel thus appear to have had certain retirement benefits. They were released, returned home, and married off with dowries from the palace. But what about imperial women? What happened to them after the deaths of their husbands? During the T'ang women were sent into the nunnery but this practice did not appear to be prevalent in the Northern Sung. Certainly, the emperors did send their deposed women into the nunnery as shown by the fates of Empresses Kuo, Meng, and two minor wives. In another instance, one of Hui-tsung's wives was demoted and reduced to commoner status.⁴⁴ What happened to her? Was she returned home? Nothing is known of her final fate. The biography of a wife of Jen-tsung who assisted in the care of children of a wife of the next emperor⁴⁵ suggests that many of the imperial women continued to live in the palace assisting with its daily operations.

Chapter 4

ADVANCEMENT

The power of palace women was a fact both recognized and feared by high-ranking men within the Chinese bureaucracy. These women had the capacity to obtain honors and advancements for themselves, their friends, and allies; they were able to remove their enemies from positions of power and to maintain their own positions in the face of powerful opposition. Although the power of palace women was amorphous, it was reflected in the bureaucracy's recognition of the functional power of palace women, the influence of wet nurses, the ability of the women to secure positions, and the extension of power to imperial relatives.

The attitude of the Chinese bureaucracy toward palace women can be perceived in documents from the collection of memorials to the reigning monarchs or regents on the various concerns and issues of the Northern Sung. The authors of these memorials made no distinction between addressing issues directly to male emperors or to female regents, suggesting that the bureaucracy recognized the sovereign right of female rulers. Examination of the memorials reveals great anxiety, on the part of some of the members of the bureaucracy, that the palace women might use their surreptitious power to maneuver situations to their advantage—to advance themselves and their relatives. In so doing, they would surround the emperor with advisors who were imperial relatives and their allies. The writers of these memorials felt that imperial relatives had to be constantly restrained from excessive power and so they repeatedly petitioned the sovereigns for removal of imperial relatives from office.¹

The biographical section of the new edition of the *History of the Sung*, entitled "Imperial Relatives," contains another indication of the recognition of the power of palace women by the Chinese bureaucracy. The annotation states that the men whose biographies were placed in this special section had obtained their positions of power exclusively through their relationships to palace women and not through their own merits.² This reveals that it was recognized that some imperial relatives were advanced only for their special relationships with palace women.

Although the Chinese officials feared the takeover of government by imperial women and their relatives, they were realistic enough to recognize that the emperor's desire to reward women who pleased him had to be satisfied. Two memorials, dated 1044 and

1108, dealt specifically with this subject. The first asked the emperor to limit his rewards to his favorite women to money and gifts and to avoid the awarding of official posts to their relatives. The second said that the emperor could appoint imperial relatives to posts as long as he did not grant them power. The officials were especially concerned that relatives of empresses be given special attention. A memorial, written in 1059, asked the emperor to give monies and properties to descendants of past empresses to prevent their families from becoming extinct.³

Sung officials were very aware that the Chinese emperor was isolated from all women except those serving in the palaces and viewed the surreptitious influence of palace women with great concern. The extent of this can be seen in memorials to the youthful emperor, Che-tsung, and his regent. In 1089, Che-tsung was only 12 or 13 and had not yet acquired a principal consort. Although the emperor was only a boy, rumors abounded that many palace women had received his favors and that several were already pregnant. Memorials were written to the emperor reminding him to take care of his health and to refrain from the temptations posed by the beautiful girls surrounding him. A memorial was written to the regent asking her to keep the boy away from the women, suggesting that she follow the example of Empress Dowager Liu who supposedly kept Emperor Jen-tsung in her own bedchambers until he acquired a principal consort. Later the ministers were apparently assured that Che-tsung had not been excessively imprudent for they wrote memorials apologizing for their misapprehensions, asking that their previous memorials on the subject be overlooked.⁴

One group of especially influential women was the emperors' wet nurses. Since the palace was the locus of much political struggle and lacked warm family ties, the emperors' wet nurses, having nourished them during childhood, occupied vital positions in their hearts. As soon as the prince she had fostered ascended the throne, the wet nurse would be given an honorary title. This practice dated back to the Han and was applied by all of the Northern Sung emperors with the exception of the founder of the dynasty.⁵

Consequently, wet nurses wielded great power. The influence of the wet nurse can be seen in an incident that occurred before the accession of Emperor Chen-tsung. At the time the prince was infatuated with Liu-shih (1), the future regent, who had been recommended to him by the silversmith. Because of Liu-shih's rumored prostitution background, she was deeply disliked by the prince's wet nurse. Emperor T'ai-tsung, noticing his son's restlessness and loss of weight, inquired of the wet nurse as to the cause of his son's affliction. The nurse blamed it on Chen-tsung's new love and the

emperor ordered the immediate expulsion of this woman from his son's feudal palace. The prince was powerless against the alliance between his father and the wet nurse and was forced to secretly shelter his beloved in the home of one of his retainers.⁶

The ability to secure positions and advancements by palace women for themselves and their relatives and allies was an important component of their power. By surrounding the emperor with their own people, the women were able to influence the politics of the times. Although the majority of the low-ranking women left no records of themselves and so remain as shadowy creatures whose role was to serve and entertain, their power to affect the fortunes of their families can be inferred from the few examples recorded in Sung sources. For instance, the military official, [Mi Fei, was said to have obtained his first post as a result of favors granted his mother for having served the mother of Emperor Shen-tsung.](#)⁷

The most dramatic example of the power of an anonymous palace woman to uplift her family socially and politically is a case uncovered by Professor Robert M. Hartwell in his studies of local history. In approximately 995, an official, Pei Yü, encountered a young girl, [Chu-shih, who was skillful in playing the lute. Impressed by her performance, P'ei Yü memorialized Emperor T'ai-tsung concerning her talents and she was subsequently summoned into the palace. Apparently, prior to her entry, her parents were people of little consequence since her father was only a teacher of the lute. However, after her entry, her brother was recommended by the local elite for examination and obtained a *chin-shih* degree in 1030. Possibly, the entry of Chu-shih into the palace as a lute-player led to her obtaining the remuneration and favors that enabled her family to finance her brother's education. The improved social position of the family enhanced by both its bettered economic status and its relationship to the palace, may have induced the local elite to recommend her brother for civil service examinations. His success in the examinations then entitled him to hold office. Descendants of the Chu family continued to hold official positions, either through success in the examinations or through *yin* \(protection\) privilege, until the end of the Southern Sung.](#)⁸ There is no way of knowing how many other families advanced in social and political standing as a result of having women in palace service. However, it can be safely assumed that the instance of the lute player, documented only in local history, was not unique. The record makes no mention of any extraordinary contribution this woman might have made—such as saving the emperor's life—which would have singled her out for special treatment. Apparently, mere service in the palace was sufficient. If this assumption is correct, thousands of unrecorded families must have benefited from this

special relationship with the palace.

The Chinese hierarchical concept of society was reflected in a civil service system that had a definite ranking classification. Female officials were graded similarly to the male officials. Thus, the highest ranking woman official in the palace, the supreme commander (*kung-ssu-ling*), graded 4a, occupied a position equal to those of a reviewing policy advisor (*chi-shih-chung*) or a drafting official of the secretariat (*chung-shu-she-jen*), while the chiefs of the bureaus (*shang*), graded 5a, were ranked as equals to the regional supervisors (*kuan-ch'a shih*). The women in the harem were also ranked according to the same system and the four imperial consorts, graded 1a, were the equals of the grand preceptor (*t'ai-shih*), the grand protector (*t'ai-pao*), or the presiding minister of the department of ministries (*shang-shu-ling*).⁹

The extent of the Chinese official's prestige and power may be inferred from the civil service rank he held. Since palace women held similar civil service ranking, perhaps a similar inference may be made. Promotions of women within the civil service system can thus be used as a measure of the extent of prestige power. The shortcoming of this yardstick is that it does not take human factors into consideration. For example, Jen-tsung's great love, Chang-shih (2) (1023-1054), was more influential while holding the title of Beautiful One, graded 4a, than any of the imperial consorts who were ranked 1a at that time. This is affirmed by a memorial written by Ou-yang Hsiu in 1042, objecting to the elaborate favors—in the form of presents and honors granted to her family—bestowed upon her. On the other hand, the prestige that accompanied the high rank of 1a was still valued, for the emperor hastened to promote her to imperial consort status and at her untimely death, posthumously honored her as empress.¹⁰

Although edicts from Chinese sovereigns emphasized merit and Confucian virtue in ordering promotions for palace women, an examination of historical documents does not support the idea that merit and virtue formed the basis of all promotions. However, it can be assumed that promotions for women within the service organization were, to a large extent, based on merit, with the emperor acting on the recommendations of female officials within the administrative hierarchy. Advancements into the imperial women's organization and subsequent promotions within that structure, however, were in all probability dependent on other factors. No clear criteria for promotions of women in the service organization were found in historical documents dealing with the Northern Sung, but suggestive evidence can be found in sources describing other historical periods. In addition, some of the criteria for advancement of women within the imperial women's organization can be deduced from the biographies of the 92 wives of the Northern Sung emperors.

Since female personnel were chosen for special tasks in accordance with their ability, promotions in the administrative structure were probably based on performance. While the majority of women selected for palace service executed basic functions, the most able were educated and prepared for promotions to official posts while the best looking ones were assigned to serve imperial persons. Those fortunate enough to be assigned as personal attendants of imperial persons had the opportunity to gain favor because of exposure to high-ranking women; at times, the emperor himself.

According to [Ch'ing sources](#), young girls chosen for their potential ability to serve in the administrative structure received daily lessons on the regulations of the palace. Furthermore, they practiced reading and writing and were tested on what they had learned the previous day. These daily lessons probably constituted the basic training given to the girls in preparation for their assuming the lowest level jobs in the administrative structure—those of female clerks of annalists. For the more advanced positions, the training was probably more elaborate. In the Ming, the licentiate (*hsiu-ts'ai*) degree was awarded to educated women who were versed in the classical style of writing and such degree holders were appointed to positions as female officials within the six bureaus. This degree was also available to men through civil service examinations and was known as the graduate of the first degree or bachelor of arts degree. Women degree holders were, however, ranked superior to their male counterparts in the Hanlin Academy despite the fact both male and female degree holders had similar educational achievements.¹¹

Education of palace women was the responsibility of the Department of Education in the Bureau of Rites and Etiquette. Although detailed information is not available, based on the requirements for the degree of licentiate it can be assumed that the study of classics and classical style of writing formed part of the curriculum. Apart from the regular classics there were special texts traditionally regarded as the 'female classics'—biographies of virtuous women (*Lieh-nü chuan*) of preceding dynasties—'women's precepts' authored by Pan Chao—and the like. These were undoubtedly an essential part of the education of palace women.

Education for women within the palaces was as old as imperial history with Pan Chao, the Han historian, being one of the early educators summoned into the palace to teach women. In the T'ang, Sung Jo-chao (c. 785) was summoned into the palace to serve as a female official responsible for the education of palace women. Her sister was the author of the 'female analects' patterned on the analects of Confucius dealing with the correct behavior of women with reference to learning, ritual behavior, serving parents, parents-in-law,

and husbands. These female scholars, in addition to their knowledge of the classics, classical writing, and correct Confucian behavior of women, were also skilled in the writing of poetry. Other achievements greatly valued in women were painting, philosophy, and music. Indeed, great courtesans were famous for their skills in philosophy, poetry, writing original verse, painting, and music. It was apparently recognized that for a woman to please the scholarly man, she herself must be erudite.¹² Hence, a woman's education must of necessity have paralleled a man's. In addition, she was also taught to be virtuous.

We can thus assume that the education department in the palaces of the Northern Sung taught classics, the classical style of writing, poetry, music, painting, philosophy, history, and female classics. These subjects were only taught to selected palace women. The most successful were promoted according to their ability and merit to the highest posts in the administrative structure. This education process no doubt contributed to the skills displayed by the many capable female rulers of Chinese history, such as Empress Wu of the T'ang, Empress Liu of the Sung, and many others who came from obscure backgrounds and had not been exposed to education apart from the training within the palace.

Advancement of women in the harem was also supposedly based on merit.¹³ However, a detailed study of the 92 imperial women shows that other factors, especially imperial favor, were often decisive. The conditions for promotion of these women were identified as family background, imperial favor, entering the nunnery, a combination of favor and the birth of children, the birth of children, a combination of birth of children and longevity, longevity, meritorious service, and patronage. Still there remain women who were promoted for reasons not known to us.¹⁴

Sometimes the reasons for the advancement of a palace woman are clear; often they are not. In many instances, several conditions appear to have been responsible for promotion and advancement. If a woman came from an important family but also bore several children, her promotion and advancement should probably be attributed to family background since their biographies stress their lineages. Other women came from less important families but if the historians felt the only fact worth documenting was their parentage then they may also be considered to have attained their advancement because of their family background. In contrast, the historians made no reference to the parentage of some women who achieved important positions, perhaps implying that their families were not worthy of mention.

Deciding which women obtained advancement as the result of gaining imperial favor is relatively easy, since that fact is usually documented in historical sources. Similarly, women who entered the

nunnery are thus noted as their advancements were usually subsequent to their entry. Women who were honored as a result of having borne children obtained their promotions immediately after their children's births as well as on the occasions of their children's enfeoffments or marriages. Others who probably should be in this grouping are those whose biographies make no mention of anything except that they had borne specific princes or princesses. At times, the lines of division between the conditions are not so clear; and the women appear to have attained their promotions through a combination of favor and birth of children or a combination of birth of children and longevity. Those women who seem not to have accomplished anything except that their lives had spanned several reigns presumably gained their advancements because of their longevity. Some women appear to have earned their advancements for their meritorious services since their biographies make special mention of their careers. Unfortunately, no reason could be found for the promotions of 19 of the 92 women under study. They were only minor wives and history records only their names and their titles.

An overview of the conditions for advancement for the entire Northern Sung period shows the following:

Family background:

15 became empresses¹⁵

3 became imperial consorts¹⁶

2 became minor wives¹⁷

Imperial favor:

7 became empresses

1 became imperial consort

1 became minor wife

Entering the nunnery:

3 became imperial consorts

1 became minor wife

Birth of children:

5 became empresses

3 became imperial consorts

3 became minor wives

Combination of imperial favor and birth of children:

7 became imperial consorts

Combination of birth of children and longevity:

6 became imperial consorts

Longevity:

3 became imperial consorts

5 became minor wives

Meritorious service:

3 became imperial consorts

2 became minor wives

Patronage:

1 became empress

2 became imperial consorts

Unknown:

2 became imperial consorts

19 became minor wives

Advancement Through Family Background

Sung empresses were, in most cases, from prominent family backgrounds and had been selected as principal rather than as secondary consorts. Aside from the 15 women who achieved empress status on the basis of family background, three of the 31 imperial consorts appear to have been promoted for the same reason. The first was the only woman posthumously honored by T'ai-tsung as imperial consort. There is no record of her having ever borne children nor is there any indication of her having won imperial favor or performing meritorious service. The only notation made by historians was that she was the daughter of a minor military official. Since her parentage was the only fact considered worthy of documentation by her peers, it can be assumed that she was advanced because of her family background. The next two women, [Shen-shih and Ts'ao-shih \(1\)](#), were [daughters of men who had faithfully served the two founding emperors and were summoned into the palace by Emperor Chen-tsung after the death of his principal consort. Neither of these women appear to have either gained imperial favor nor given birth to children and must have attained their advancements on the basis of their family backgrounds.](#)¹⁸

Of the 32 minor wives, two were promoted, in all probability, on the basis of family backgrounds. Both these women were daughters of officials and no other reasons for their promotions can be readily found. They were granted advancements not only by their husbands but also by subsequent emperors.¹⁹ It is thus apparent that although family background played an important role in the advancement of imperial women, many were not able to achieve high positions during their husbands' lifetimes. Family background alone, therefore, was not sufficient to guarantee promotion to high rank.

Advancement Through Imperial Favor

If a woman was not from an official family background the only

way she could obtain the position of empress was via the emperor's continued favor. Since the emperor could have only one empress at a time, she would either have to wait for the principal consort to die or influence the emperor to depose his empress. The emperor was, however, free to name a deceased favorite as empress posthumously. Seven women were advanced to empress status via imperial favor. Three lived to enjoy their positions while four were named posthumously.

The best example of promotion to empress status due to the emperor's continued favor is [Liu-shih \(1\), wife of Chen-tsung](#). It was said that the emperor was so impressed by stories of the beauty of women of Shu, stemming from the infatuation the founding emperor had for Fei-shih, that as feudal prince he inquired of the truth of these stories when dealing with a silversmith, Kung Mei, a native of Shu. Seeing a chance to ingratiate himself with the prince who was then governor of the Sung capital, Kung Mei brought him Liu-shih (1). Chen-tsung was delighted with this young woman and Kung Mei and his family were richly rewarded by this relationship with the imperial family as Liu-shih (1) was named empress in 1012, and became regent in 1022, ruling for 11 years.²⁰

The second woman to become empress because of imperial favor, [Liu-shih \(2\) \(d.1113\), wife of Che-tsung](#), was promoted from the ranks of palace women. Nothing is known of her parentage but she was recorded as being so favored by her husband that he had his empress sent into the nunnery in order to have Liu-shih (2) named empress. Although the officials objected to deposing the empress, they were powerless to prevent it; however, they were able to delay Liu-shih's installation for three years by insisting that an empress be selected from an acceptable family. Finally, in 1099, she gave birth to a son who was named heir-apparent and Liu-shih (2) was named empress. Unfortunately, both her husband and son died that same year and her brother-in-law became the next emperor. She was never looked upon favorably by the court and in 1113, hearing rumors that Hui-tsung was considering deposing her because of her interference with affairs outside the palace, she became depressed and hung herself.²¹

Biographies of the third woman, [Cheng-shih \(1078-1130\), wife of Hui-tsung](#), do not clearly state that she became empress through imperial favor although her promotion record suggests it. She had entered the palace at an unknown date and age but was promoted in the harem in 1100. She was said to have loved to read and was favored by the emperor for her literary talents. She gave birth to one son, who died in infancy, and five daughters. She was repeatedly promoted so that within three years she had already advanced to Pure

Consort la (ii). In 1100, two years after the death of the principal consort, Cheng-shih was named empress. She was captured, along with Hui-tsung and the entire court, by the Chin, and sent into exile in 1127.²²

The first of the four women posthumously named empress was Chang-shih (1), daughter of a minor military official. Jen-tsung had been enamored of her and had wanted to name her his principal consort. However, the regent, Empress Dowager Liu, was opposed to this and instead installed Kuo-shih, the daughter of a regional commandant as the empress. Four years later, shortly after Chang-shih's death, she was posthumously named Beautiful One, 4a, and after the death of the regent, Jen-tsung posthumously named his first love empress.

The next woman, Chang-shih (2), was the famous love in the life of Jen-tsung. Placed into palace service as an orphan, she grew up near the emperor and she learned to please him. Her power was felt both within and without the palace to the extent that whatever the emperor gave her—whether jewelry or flowers—would set the fashion for all women. In 1048, Jen-tsung ordered that she be honored as Precious Consort and that a special ceremony be held where she was to receive the obeisance of the wives of the highest officials. He further ordered that posthumous honors be conferred on her ancestors for three generations. The rationale for this unique honor was that she had saved the emperor's life. It was recorded that one night, while she was with the emperor, a mutiny arose among the palace guards. Chang-shih (2) persuaded the emperor to send a eunuch to investigate rather than doing so personally. At first it was reported that the noise was simply that of someone beating a child, but Chang-shih knew better and ordered the eunuchs to get water in the event the mutineers should set the palace on fire. Promising to reward the men if they pacified the uprising, she cut off the hair of those eunuchs who assisted in the effort as a sign of recognition and was thus able to rally support and ensure the emperor's safety. Chang-shih died in 1054 and the emperor honored her posthumously as empress.²³

The third woman posthumously named empress was Liu-shih (4) (1089-1113), wife of Hui-tsung. Born in a poor family she was recruited into the palace in 1100. Gaining the emperor's favor she was promoted into the harem two years later. From then on she was repeatedly advanced until she reached the rank of Noble Consort in 1108, the highest title a secondary wife could attain. In 1113, she suddenly became ill and died. The bereaved emperor posthumously honored her as empress. Around that time, Hui-tsung had become interested in Liu-shih (5) (1086-1120) who had been summoned into the palace because of her beauty. After her death, the emperor also

named her empress.²⁴

The emperor's favor was not always enough to assure a woman's establishment as empress since the bureaucracy was unwilling to accept a woman from an obscure background in that position. The rationale for the promotion of two of the seven—Liu-shih (1) and Liu-shih (2)—was that they were the mothers of future emperors. This rationale was so important that Liu-shih (1) fraudulently claimed the son of another palace woman as her own in order to attain the position of empress.

Only one woman, Tsui-shih, achieved imperial consort status through imperial favor. Tsui-shih was advanced to this high rank within four years of her entry into the harem. Promoted to Worthy Consort, 1a (iv), in 1112 she was honored as Noble Consort, 1a (i) in 1116. Having reached the highest rank possible, she managed to alienate the emperor at the funeral of Liu-shih (5). The emperor was heartbroken over the death of his favorite wife and seeing Tsui-shih behave in a nonchalant and uncaring manner, he angrily ordered her demoted and dismissed from the palace.²⁵

Shang-shih (d.1050) gained minor wife status as the result of imperial favor. Unfortunately, she was a participant in an incident involving Empress Kuo which signaled the end to both women's careers. Shortly after the death of Empress Dowager Liu, Jen-tsung learned that she was not his real mother. Resenting the dead regent's oppression of him he projected his feelings of hostility on the young bride the empress dowager had chosen for him. At that time Shang-shih and another young woman were his favorites and neither of them was friendly with Empress Kuo. One day, in 1033, all three women were in the presence of the emperor when Shang-shih offended the empress. Kuo-shih leaned over to slap the disrespectful minor wife but the emperor interfered and became the recipient of the blow. Angered, Jen-tsung decided to use this incident to depose the empress. The bureaucracy was extremely agitated over the fate of the empress and to placate them the emperor also banished the two minor wives into the nunnery in 1034. Shang-shih died in the nunnery in 1050 and was posthumously promoted.²⁶

Advancement Through Entering the Nunnery

Although biographies of Empress Wu of T'ang claim that it was the practice for harem women to enter the nunnery after the deaths of their husbands, this does not appear to be true for the Northern Sung. Only five women are recorded as having entered the nunnery during this period. One, Shang-shih, has already been discussed in the preceding section. Of the other four, three became imperial consorts,

while the fourth never advanced beyond a minor wife.

The first of the three to become an imperial consort was **Chu-shih (1)** (d.1035), wife of T'ai-tsung. She was promoted from the ranks of palace women and nothing is known of her family origins. Appointed Talented One, 5a (i) in 993, she remained at that rank until the death of her husband. Being childless, she would have been forgotten by the court had she not elected to enter the nunnery. She was repeatedly advanced by Chen-tsung and was elevated to imperial consort by Jen-tsung and posthumously honored as Virtuous Consort, 1a (iii), in 1044.²⁷

The next woman was **Tu-shih** (d.1046), wife of Chen-tsung. She had served in Chen-tsung's feudal palace and was credited with giving birth to a daughter who died in infancy. Perhaps fearing the jealousy of the all-powerful Liu-shih (1), Tu-shih decided to enter the nunnery. Her repeated promotions, conferred by Jen-tsung, were probably for her meritorious service in praying for the fortunes of the empire. She was posthumously named Noble Consort, 1a (i).²⁸

The last woman to become an imperial consort by entering the nunnery was **Yang-shih (2)**, wife of Jen-tsung. She was the third woman in the slapping incident that led to the demotion of Empress Kuo. Although her role in the occurrence was minimal, she was also sent into the nunnery along with the other two women. She was, however, reinstated after the death of Shang-shih in 1050 and named Fair and Handsome One, 3a. She died 13 years later and was posthumously named One of Cultivated Countenance, 2a (v), then advanced to One of Noble Deportment, (a special title reserved for wives of previous emperors). Both promotions were ordered by Ying-tsung. In 1111, during the reign of Hui-tsung, Yang-shih (2) was, for unknown reasons, posthumously named Worthy Consort, 1a (iv).²⁹

The only woman to owe her advancement to minor wife status to entry into the nunnery was **Ch'ien-shih** (c.1085), wife of Shen-tsung. Nothing is recorded about her except that she had entered the nunnery and was promoted by two subsequent emperors. Eventually, she was posthumously named Fair and Handsome One, 3a.³⁰

Advancement on the Basis for Bearing Children

A significant condition for advancement was the bearing of imperial children. The need for an heir was an important problem for the Sung; infant mortality in those days took its toll on the imperial children as well as on those of the general populace. Three of the nine Northern Sung emperors had no heirs. Two were succeeded by their younger brothers and the third, an only surviving son, was forced to adopt the son of a cousin as heir. Excluding the founding emperor,

whose son was set aside by the emperor's brother, only three emperors were not faced with the problem of having no heirs. The three were T'ai-tsung, Shen-tsung, and Hui-tsung. T'ai-tsung had 13 wives who gave him nine sons, of whom seven grew to maturity. Shen-tsung's 14 wives gave birth to twelve sons, five of whom survived, while Hui-tsung's 19 wives produced 29 sons, of whom 25 grew to maturity.

Theoretically, the eldest son of the principal consort was to inherit the throne. In practice, few principal consorts had sons who lived to succeed their fathers. Of the nine emperors in this study, only four were sons of principal consorts. If we exclude the first two emperors, who were brothers and founders of the dynasty, as not relevant to this discussion, only two emperors were surviving sons of principal consorts.

The need for an heir, therefore, sometimes governed the number of wives chosen by an emperor. The need for an heir to the throne moved both Chen-tsung and Jen-tsung to have a large number of wives. Since Chen-tsung's first five sons had all died during infancy, prior to the birth of Jen-tsung, the emperor was forced to choose three additional women from prominent families in the hope that they would bear heirs. Once the sought-after heir was born, Chen-tsung acquired no additional wives. From 1012 until his death in 1022, Chen-tsung's harem consisted only of Empress Liu, her friend and protégé, Yang-shih (1), the natural mother of Jen-tsung, the three daughters of prominent families, and Tu-shih who had entered the nunnery.

The need of an heir also played an important role in the selection of wives for Jen-tsung. Although he had three sons, all of them died in infancy and he was finally persuaded to adopt an heir. During his lifetime, Jen-tsung had 17 wives but he never had more than three or four wives at the same time as women in those days frequently died at childbirth. Five of the imperial women in the Northern Sung became empresses because they bore children. All were mothers of emperors and established as empress dowager by their sons either posthumously or after the death of their husbands' principal consorts.

The first woman to achieve empress status through the production of children was the mother of Chen-tsung. Although she was the mother of the heir, she was not given any honors by her husband. This would indicate that bearing children without the continued favor of the emperor was not sufficient for advancement to empress. It was only after her son became emperor that she was posthumously named empress dowager.³¹ The next woman to attain empress status in this manner was the mother of Jen-tsung. [Li-shih \(2\)](#) was the granddaughter of a minor military officer. The date of her

entry into palace service is not known and history documents her as having served in the capacity of Director-of-apartments. Immediately after giving birth to a son she was cast aside and her son was claimed by Liu-shih (1) as her natural son. Li-shih (2) remained in the shadows all through her life and was not promoted until her son learned of her identity after the death of Empress Dowager Liu. It was only then that Li-shih (2) was posthumously named empress dowager.³²

Chu-shih (3) (1051-1102), mother of Che-tsung, was the third woman to become empress because of her son. Her original name was Tsui but after her father's death she was raised as a foster child by the Jen family. When her mother remarried she took the name of her step-father, Chu. The date of her entry into palace service is not known but she was named Talented One 5a (i) in 1075 and Fair and Handsome One, 3a, in 1076 after giving birth to a son. When her son became emperor at the age of nine, Chu-shih (3) was named Supreme Consort while the principal consort, Hsiang-shih, was named Empress Dowager. In 1102, the empress dowager died and Chu-shih was honored as empress dowager.³³

The fourth woman to be named empress because of her son was Ch'en-shih (3) (1053-1089), mother of Hui-tsung. The date of her entry into palace service is not known but she was advanced to Talented One, 5a (i), after giving birth to the future emperor. Promoted to Beautiful One, 4a, in 1085, Ch'en-shih died four years later at the age of 36. Her husband died the same year and Che-tsung became emperor. In 1100, Che-tsung died leaving no heirs and her son was named his successor. Hui-tsung posthumously named his mother empress dowager in 1102.³⁴ The last woman to become empress by bearing children was Wei-shih (2), mother of Kao-tsung, who was recommended to the palace by an official trying to ingratiate himself with the emperor. Details of her life were discussed earlier.

Three women appear to have been promoted to imperial consorts for having borne children. The first, Yü-shih (d. 1039), wife of Jen-tsung, was promoted from the ranks of palace women and had given birth to a son and a daughter. At her death in 1039, she had risen only to the position of One of Luminous Department, 2a (i), but was posthumously honored by Che-tsung as Virtuous Consort, 1a (iii), during a general promotion. The other two women, Hsing-shih (d.1104) and Lin-shih (d.1090), wives of Shen-tsung, were both of unknown parentage and promoted from the service women's organization. Hsing-shih gave birth to four sons, all of whom died in infancy but she was awarded honors at their births so that by 1078 she had already been named Worthy Consort, 1a (iv). She was honored by the two subsequent emperors and advanced to Noble Consort, 1a (i). Lin-shih had given birth to two sons and a daughter and had also

received her promotions as a direct result of their births. Unfortunately, none of her children survived to maturity and she received no additional promotions. After her death, she was posthumously promoted on occasions of general conferment and advanced to the rank of Noble Consort.³⁵

Three women appear to have achieved their minor wife status as a result of producing imperial children. The first, Jen-shih, was not listed among T'ai-tsung's wives but her name was found in an edict issued by Chen-tsung posthumously honoring the mother of his brother, Yüan-fen (d.c.993). It is possible that Jen-shih was only a palace serving woman and had never been officially admitted into the imperial women's organization either during her husband's or her own lifetimes.

The next woman, Chang-shih (5) (c.1041), wife of Jen-tsung, gave birth to a son who died at the age of three. She achieved the position of Beautiful One, 4a, before her death and was posthumously named One of Luminous Countenance, 2a (ii). She may have been one of the four orphaned Chang sisters placed into palace service and may have owed her access to the emperor to the patronage of her sister, Chang-shih (2), whom the emperor dearly loved. There appears to be no other reason for the advancement of the last woman Kuo-shih (3) (d.1103), wife of Shen-tsung, to minor wife status apart from the fact that she had given the emperor a son in 1082. Although the prince died the day after his birth she was probably remembered for it and in 1100 Hui-tsung named her Talented One, 5a (i), in a general promotion when he ascended the throne. Kuo-shih died in 1103 and was posthumously advanced to Fair and Handsome One, 3a.³⁶

Although the bearing of children did bring honor and recognition to many women, there were others who gained no acknowledgement. This can be seen in the case of T'ai-tsung who had 16 children, 10 of whom were born of mothers whose identities were not thought important enough for documentation. Similarly, the identities of six of the mothers of Chen-tsung's children remain anonymous. The reason for the women not gaining recognition could be due to their not surviving childbirth. Women who died while giving birth were probably forgotten by the palace when occasions for conferring honors arose. Occasionally, when a strong empress was in power, palace women, fearing her rage, might have been either forced to or might have preferred to remain anonymous rather than risk incurring her wrath. This was especially true at the time of Empress Liu. Indeed, it was said that Chen-tsung so feared his wife that whenever a palace woman bore him a child, the emperor would designate the child as belonging to his retainer, Chang Ching-tsung.³⁷

Advancement Through Imperial Favor and Bearing Children

The production of children was, therefore, not always sufficient to ensure advancements for the women unless they also enjoyed either imperial favor or a certain degree of longevity. Seven women became imperial consorts by a combination of favor and bearing children. Apparently, a woman who won the emperor's continued favor could advance to high position either during her own lifetime or in the event of untimely death, be granted posthumous honors. However, a woman who caught the emperor's passing fancy, no matter how intense the infatuation while it lasted, needed an extra advantage or two to assure advancement. Frequently, these promotions were granted only by subsequent emperors and a woman would need to have a certain degree of longevity to enjoy these honors.

Seven women became imperial consorts by a combination of favor and bearing children. The first two, [Miao-shih \(1024-1093\)](#) and [Tung-shih \(d.1060\)](#), were wives of [Jen-tsung](#). They were both of unknown parentage and promoted from the ranks of palace women. [Miao-shih](#) was first named Talented One, 5a (i), then promoted to Beautiful One, 4a, in 1038. She gave birth to a son the following year and was rewarded with the title of One of Luminous Countenance, 2a (ii). Unfortunately, the son died the following year. She also gave birth to the eldest princess and on the occasion of the young woman's marriage in 1057, the mother was advanced to Worthy Consort, 1a (iv). [Jen-tsung](#) died the following year and [Miao-shih](#) received no honors at his death nor during the short reign of [Ying-tsung](#). However, for an as yet undiscerned reason, [Shen-tsung](#) advanced her to Noble Consort, 1a (i), in 1085. [Miao-shih](#) died in 1093 at 69. While [Miao-shih](#) lived to enjoy the imperial consort status conferred upon her by her own husband, [Tung-shih](#) had the unique distinction of being the only wife posthumously elevated to imperial consort by [Jen-tsung](#). Not much is known of her life and accomplishments and why she was worthy of such honor except that she had given birth to four daughters.³⁸

The next five women to advance through a combination of imperial favor and bearing children were all wives of [Hui-tsung](#) who named six of his wives, imperial consorts—the largest number so honored by a Northern Sung emperor. A great ladies' man, [Hui-tsung](#) had the largest number of wives and busied himself with conferring titles annually on members of his harem from the beginning of his reign until 1118 when for some unknown reason he skipped a year. In 1120 and 1121 he again granted advancements to his wives. Then in 1122 he demoted [Tsui-shih](#) to a commoner, and from then on until his

abdication, perhaps because of political troubles, he did not promote any of his wives. All of Hui-tsung's wives – with the exception of the principal consort – were promoted from the ranks of palace women. Five are thought to owe their advancements to a combination of favor and bearing children. Four lived to enjoy the honor while one was promoted posthumously.

The first of these five women was Wang-shih (3) (c.1107) who enjoyed imperial favor while the principal consort was still living. Named Beautiful One, 4a, in 1101, she was repeatedly advanced until she gained the title of Virtuous Consort, 1a (iii), in 1107. She is recorded as having given birth to five sons and three daughters all of whom died in infancy. The next woman, Ch'iao-shih (1) (c.1103), was the bosom friend of the mother of Kao-tsung. These two had pledged, as young palace women, to help each other if one should win honors. Ch'iao-shih gave birth to seven sons and although all died in infancy, she was promoted with the birth of each of them and within 10 years she was advanced to Noble Consort, 1a (i). She was captured, with the entire court, and died in exile. The third woman, Wang-shih (4) (d.1117), gave birth to two sons and five daughters. Promoted from the service organization, she was repeatedly advanced until she attained the rank of Virtuous Consort within eight years. At her death, she held the rank of Noble Consort. The next woman, Yang-shih (5) (d.1115), was posthumously honored as imperial consort. Promoted into the harem after giving birth to a son, she died soon after and was named Worthy Consort by Hui-tsung. The fifth wife, Wang-shih (5) (c.1108), was advanced to Worthy Consort within 10 years of her entry into the harem. She had given birth to a son and a daughter.³⁹

Advancement Through Bearing Children and Longevity

The pattern of promotions of palace women indicates that it was the practice for an emperor, on ascending the throne, to advance not only his own wives but also those of preceding emperors. The women he promoted could be either dead or still living. The highest title granted under these circumstances was that of Noble Consort unless the woman was the previous empress or the emperor's mother. Conferments were also made on the occasion of births, enfeoffments, and marriages of the children of specific palace women. Posthumous honors were given, at times, immediately after the death of palace women. Hence, a woman who was not particularly favored by her husband and had not received advancements from him might achieve recognition if she outlived him. In addition, the highest honor that a

woman could achieve, that of empress dowager, could be attained only as a widow. During the Northern Sung, five empress dowagers ruled for a total of 25½ years simply because they outlived their husbands. Consequently, longevity or outliving a husband was an important factor in the advancement of palace women. While some were honored posthumously, the long-lived ones enjoyed their promotions.

The first of the six women to be promoted through bearing children and longevity was Tsang-shih who was summoned into T'ai-tsung's palace for her beauty. The next woman, Fang-shih (d.1031), was probably a palace woman who caught the fleeting fancy of T'ai-tsung and gave birth to a son, Yüan-yen (984-1044). The emperor must have lost interest in her soon after for she was not given any honors in the 13-year interval between the birth of her son and the death of her husband. When Chen-tsung ascended the throne, he honored his brother's mother. Jen-tsung also repeatedly advanced her until she was posthumously named Noble Consort. The third woman, Chou-shih (c.1059), was first favored by Jen-tsung because of her friendship with his beloved Chang-shih (2). The date of her entry is not known but she was named Beautiful One, 4a, in 1059. The following year she was promoted to Fair and Handsome One, 3a, and in 1063, shortly before her husband's death, she was advanced to One of Beautiful Countenance, 1b (vi). In 1075, Chou-shih married off her eldest daughter and was honored as Worthy Consort, 1a (iv), by Shen-tsung. In 1082, she married off her second daughter and was named Virtuous Consort, 1a (iii). She was again advanced, in 1085 and 1100, to the positions of Pure and Noble Consorts, 1a (ii) and 1a (i).⁴⁰

The next three women to advance in this manner were all wives of Shen-tsung. The first, Wu-shih (2) (d.1107), had given birth to a son and a daughter but had achieved only the title of Talented One at her husband's death. All her advancements were awarded by subsequent emperors. In 1085, when Che-tsung honored all his father's wives he promoted her to Beautiful One and in 1100, Hui-tsung advanced her to One of Luminous Deportment, 2a (i), and the following year, to Worthy Consort. Since Wu-shih had come from an unknown background and her daughter had died in infancy, her repeated promotions after her husband's death were probably awarded because of her son's services to both Che-tsung and Hui-tsung. Sung-shih (2) (d.1117), the fifth woman to so advance, had given birth to two sons and a daughter and all her promotions were conferred on the occasions of their births or at their enfeoffments. Neither of her sons survived to maturity and at Shen-tsung's death she was ranked only One of Fulfilled Beauty, 2a (ix). In 1097, at the marriage of her daughter, Sung-shih was honored as Worthy Consort, 1a (iv). Later she

was repeatedly advanced and was named Noble Consort in 1113, four years before her death. The sixth woman, Chang-shih (8) (d.1106), was named Talented One, 5a (i), after giving birth to a daughter. Unfortunately, the child died in 1078 and she received no further honors during Shen-tsung's lifetime. After outliving her husband, Chang-shih was promoted first to One of Luminous Countenance, 2a (ii), then was posthumously named Pure Consort, 1a (ii).⁴¹

Advancement on the Basis of Longevity

Three women appear to have become imperial consorts through longevity. All three had been promoted from the service organization and were of unknown parentage. None left detailed records of themselves. The first, Kao-shih (1) (d.1022), was the wife of T'ai-tsung. She had no powerful relatives at court and is not recorded as having given birth. She must not have been especially favored by her husband since he promoted her to only Talented One. She attained her high status by having been repeatedly advanced by Chen-tsung and Jen-tsung. She was posthumously named Worthy Consort.⁴²

Nothing is known of the role widowed imperial women played in the palaces. Presumably, they assisted or supervised palace women in their duties in the same way Chinese widows have traditionally helped around the house. This may have been the reason why Kao-shih was so well rewarded. The career of Feng-shih (1) (c.1037), wife of Jen-tsung, lends credence to this assumption. Feng-shih, who lived through five reigns and was posthumously named Worthy Consort after her death at the age of 77, was not listed among the wives in the *Huang-Sung shih-ch'ao kang-yao*, but her name appeared among the consorts in the *Sung-shih* biographies. She was said to have adopted a young palace woman, Lin-shih, who later found favor with Shen-tsung. Feng-shih was said to have helped Lin-shih care for her two sons. Therefore, women whose lives spanned several reigns may have received further advancements because they performed valuable services to the palaces as widows. The third woman to gain her advancements via longevity was Feng-shih (2) (d.1103), wife of Shen-tsung. A palace woman of unknown origins, she left no record of herself apart from the dates of her promotions and death. She had gained no recognition during the lifetime of her husband but was named Talented One, 5a (i), by Che-tsung in 1085. In 1099, for no apparent reason Feng-shih was promoted Fair and Handsome One, 3a, and in 1100, Hui-tsung further advanced her to One of Cultivated Countenance, 2a (v). She died three years later and was posthumously named Worthy Consort. It is possible that apart from living through a span of several reigns, she may also have provided valuable assistance

in the palace.⁴³

During the Northern Sung five women appear to have gained minor wife status on the basis of longevity. All five were of unknown parentage and promoted from the service organization. They had received no honors from their husbands but had been advanced by subsequent emperors during general promotions. No accomplishments of theirs are documented and their only commendation appears to have been due to their having led long lives.⁴⁴

Advancement Through Meritorious Service

Three women were promoted to imperial consort status because they rendered meritorious service to the palace. The first was Shao-shih (d.1016) who had begun her career as a serving woman in T'ai-tsung's feudal palace. When T'ai-tsung became emperor, Shao-shih was made Director-of-clothing then promoted to Chief-of-surveillance. In 1013, Chen-tsung created the position of Supreme commander-of-the-palaces especially for her. In 1033, Jen-tsung posthumously named her One of Supreme Department and again in 1044, as Worthy Consort. Two interesting points can be deduced from the career of this woman. First, she never held an official harem title during her lifetime yet subsequent emperors conferred titles reserved for an emperor's wife on her. This suggests that female officials were perhaps also thought of as wives of emperors. The second point is that her posthumous honors, conferred by Jen-tsung, came 17 and 27 years after her death, suggesting perhaps that she had made a great impression on him so that he remembered her and upheld her memory as an example to other palace women.⁴⁵

The next woman, Ch'en-shih (1) (d.996), had served her husband, Chen-tsung, while he was still a feudal prince, holding the rank of Director-of-clothing. In 997 when Chen-tsung became emperor, she was posthumously named Worthy Consort. Since Ch'en-shih did not appear to have had children and no record of her other accomplishments is available, her advancement was probably because of meritorious service as a female official. The third woman, Yang-shih (4), wife of Shen-tsung, was mentioned only in a short sentence in the *Huang Sung shih-ch'ao kang-yao*. The entry notes that she was posthumously named imperial consort in appreciation for her services as an official in Shen-tsung's feudal palace.⁴⁶

Two women appear to have attained their elevation to minor wife status through meritorious service. Li-shih (3) (d.993) was recorded as having been appointed Chief-of-services in 990 and reportedly died four years later. She was posthumously named One of Luminous Countenance, 2a (ii), in 990 and promoted to One of Pure

Countenance, 1b (ii) in 1034 then to One of Pure Deportment, 1b (i) in 1036. The next woman, Hsü-shih (c.1008), listed as a wife of Chen-tsung, was reportedly also a female official who was posthumously named Talented One in 1033 then advanced to Beautiful One in 1035.⁴⁷

The careers of these five women bring up questions that cannot be answered at this time. Although all five were listed as wives of emperors, they appear to have been officials in the service organization rather than consorts. Does this particular type of promotion imply that all female officials were considered to be wives of the emperors they were serving? If these women were actually wives of emperors does this mean imperial women also served simultaneously in the administrative structure? If a duality of roles existed why did historical records make the distinction between the two women's organizations? Why were members of the women's organizations distinguished as palace women, female officials, consorts, and empresses? Looking at the question from a different perspective, were the titles of imperial women and their respective ranking awarded to female officials whose meritorious services warranted the kind of advancement that was beyond the ranking available in the administrative hierarchy? If that is true, then were these women perhaps never wives of the emperors they served and were the posthumous titles awarded to them only for their services as female officials?

Advancement Through Patronage

Although meritorious service could lead to advancements for palace women a more effective method was through the patronage of an already powerful and established person. The principal consorts, chosen by the guardians or mothers of emperors, could be said to have advanced in this manner. This was especially true in the cases of the deposed empresses who were protected as long as their patronesses lived but were to suffer the wraths of their husbands as soon as their protectors died. Three women appear to owe their advancements to patronage.

The most important woman to advance through patronage was Yang-shih (1). Both her father and grandfather had held minor offices in the military and she entered the palace in 996 at 13. At that time Chen-tsung was enamored of Liu-shih (1) who took an immediate liking to the girl. In 1004, when Liu-shih was named Beautiful One, 4a, she induced Chen-tsung to name her friend Talented One, 5a (i). From that time on the two women's careers were interlinked. Whenever Liu-shih was promoted she made certain her protegee was

also remembered. Thus in 1008 Liu-shih was promoted to One of Cultivated Countenance, 2a (v), and her friend was named Fair and Handsome One, 3a. When Liu-shih was first advanced to Virtuous Consort, 1a (iii), and then made empress, Yang-shih was promoted to One of Beautiful Deportment, 1b (v). Furthermore, in 1014, Empress Liu induced the emperor to name her protegee as Virtuous Consort. When Liu-shih was made empress dowager and regent, she created a special position for her friend, that of Supreme Consort. In her will, the regent decreed that Yang-shih was to succeed her but Jen-tsung, already 23, was not willing to tolerate another regent. Instead, he named Yang-shih empress dowager but refused to share his power with her as regent.

Yang-shih (1), therefore, attained her power and influence through the patronage of the most powerful woman in the palace. It can also be said that Yang-shih earned her advances through meritorious service to her patron for it was she who assisted in the fraudulent claim of Jen-tsung as Liu-shih's son and it was she who assisted in the upbringing of the future emperor. Yang-shih was thus able to obtain numerous favors and offices for three generations of her relatives from both her patron and Jen-tsung. She was also instrumental, with the assistance of Han Ch'i, in persuading Jen-tsung to adopt an heir to the throne after the early deaths of the emperor's three sons.⁴⁸

Two women, Chang-shih (3) (d.1104) and Chang-shih (4) (d.1106), both wives of Jen-tsung, appear to owe their advancements to imperial consort status to patronage. Neither of these two women appear to have borne any children nor are they recorded as having accomplished anything outstanding yet they were both posthumously advanced—the first, to Noble Consort and the second, to Worthy Consort. Since no apparent reason can be found to merit their advances, it may be assumed that they were the other two orphaned sisters of Jen-tsung's beloved wife and were advanced because of their sister's special position.⁴⁹

To summarize, during the entire Northern Sung period, 28 women achieved the exalted position of empress. Fifteen (53.5%) appear to have attained it as a result of their family background, seven (25%) through imperial favor, five (17.8%) as a result of their sons' ascension to the throne, and one (3.5%) through patronage. It would seem that in advancing to the highest position for a woman, family background was the most decisive factor, imperial favor ranked second, production of children third and patronage last.

Thirty-one women became imperial consorts—three (9.6%) did so on the basis of family background, one (3.2%) because of imperial favor, three (9.6%) through entering the nunnery, three (9.6%) by

bearing imperial children, seven (22.5%) through a combination of favor and bearing children, six (19.3%) by the combination of bearing children and longevity, three (9.6%) principally by outliving their husbands, three (9.6 %) because of meritorious service, and two (6.4%) through patronage. In evaluating the conditions for promotion to imperial consort, it appears that the most effective one was the combination of bearing children and imperial favor, followed by the combination of bearing children and longevity, family background, entering the nunnery, bearing of children, longevity, meritorious service, patronage, with the least effective being that of imperial favor. This assessment suggests that if a woman advanced through imperial favor she usually reached the top, either during her lifetime or posthumously. The only woman who achieved imperial consort status through favor and was not named empress was Tsui-shih who had managed to offend the emperor and was demoted to commoner.

Of the 33 women who became minor wives, two (6.06%) accomplished it through family background, one (3.03%) on the basis of imperial favor, one (3.03%) by entering the nunnery, three (9.09%) by the birth of children, five (15.1%) as a result of longevity, two (6.06%) through meritorious service, while 19 (57.5%) were promoted for unknown reasons. Predicated upon these percentages it seems that the largest group of women was advanced for unknown reasons (57.5%), but of those promoted for specific conditions the most effective was longevity, followed by bearing children, family background, meritorious service, imperial favor, and entering the nunnery.

Advancements in the palace were at times extremely dangerous because of the jealousies and political intricacies involved. This was especially true in the cases of Empresses Kuo and Meng, who were both deposed by their husbands. Both these women were imposed upon their husbands by regents in power even though the emperors preferred other women within the harem. Members of the bureaucracy who openly opposed the deposings not only were unable to stop the emperors but were actually demoted.

In examining the two incidents, we find the circumstances to have been extremely involved. On the one hand, there were emotional factors. The choice of [Kuo-shih \(2\) as empress was made by the regent despite Jen-tsung's obvious preference for Chang-shih \(1\)](#). The emperor therefore resented his empress because she represented the power of his foster mother. Since the empress knew that her course lay with the powerful regent, she also supported her in all matters including politics. Thus, the emperor resented her all the more. On the death of the regent, Jen-tsung discovered that his mother was, in reality, the palace woman [Li-shih \(4\)](#) but that he had been deceived

all his life by Liu-shih (1) so that she could attain and retain power. Since the regent was now dead, Jen-tsung could no longer punish her. Empress Kuo, however, was a living memorial of the hated regent—the woman who had oppressed him all his life – and she was now vulnerable. Then there was the jealousy among the women competing for the emperor's favor, Shang-shih and Yang-shih (2) – the women involved in the slapping incident used as a pretext to degrade Empress Kuo – who were then favored by Jen-tsung. They did not like the empress and constantly bickered with her. Furthermore, Empress Kuo was barren. On the other hand, there was the political sphere where Empress Kuo was allied with the faction that was now out of power. At the regent's death, Jen-tsung and Lü I-chien plotted to rid the court of her henchmen. When Empress Kuo heard of the conspiracy she was extremely angered and caused Lü I-chien to be exiled. Within a year, however, Jen-tsung had consolidated his power and Lü was recalled. The latter, whose previous exile from court had been engineered by the empress, allegedly encouraged Jen-tsung to degrade her.

To justify the deposing of Empress Kuo, the emperor showed the nail marks on his face as sufficient cause. Many of the ministers objected to the deposing and in memorials petitioned the emperor to reinstate the empress. These memorials, written in 1033, stated that the slapping incident was not serious enough to warrant such harsh punishment, that none of the Sung emperors had previously deposed an empress, and that if Jen-tsung did so his action would set a precedent for future emperors who would then feel free to eliminate whichever wife they no longer desired. The memorials said that if this kind of disorder should occur, the people would become restless since the empress was the mother of the people. Criticisms of the deposing of Empress Kuo so angered Jen-tsung that he banished two high ranking officials to the provinces for espousing her cause. The banishment of these men caused [Fu Pi \(d.1085\)](#) to remonstrate with the emperor stating that the latter had erred in two areas. The first was that the emperor had deposed his empress for no cause and with no precedent. [Fu Pi](#) said that even commoners had to ask their parents' permission before ousting their wives, yet Jen-tsung did so without informing his ancestors in the temple and while the dirt on the empress dowager's grave was not yet dry. This behavior was extremely unfilial. The second area in which the emperor was at fault was in punishing loyal ministers who had been horrified at this unfilial act as these two men had only remonstrated with the emperor in the proper performance of their duties and should not have been banished.⁵⁰

The circumstances surrounding the deposing of Empress Meng were very similar to those discussed in the deposing of Empress Kuo.

In fact, the similarities were pointed out in memorials intended either to oppose the degrading or the installation of Liu-shih (2) as empress. This can be seen in the memorial written in 1098 stating that the degrading of Empress Meng was similar to that of Empress Kuo since they both stemmed from jealousies within the inner palaces. Analysis of the circumstances surrounding the degrading of Empress Meng also points to two spheres—emotional and political.

Che-tsung, like Jen-tsung, was oppressed by a strong regent. In the case of Che-tsung it was his grandmother, Empress Dowager Kao, who had reversed his father's policies and dismissed Wang An-shih's faction while recalling Ssu-ma Kuang and his followers to power. After the supreme empress dowager's death in 1093, Che-tsung reversed her policies and recalled the followers of Wang An-shih into government. The emperor resented his grandmother to the extent that he wanted to degrade her posthumously but did not do so because of the intervention of Empress Dowager Hsiang. The emperor then turned his hostility against his principal consort and had her deposed. The degrading of Empress Meng was also due, in part, to jealousies within the palace since Che-tsung also wanted to install his favorite, Liu-shih (2) as empress.

Within the political sphere, the degrading of the empress was tied to the factional struggles of the times. When Che-tsung assumed control of the government he began to rid it of followers of the regent, employing instead men such as [Chang Tun](#) (1031-1101), who had previously worked for Wang An-shih and [Ts'ai Pien](#) (1052-1112), son-in-law of Wang An-shih and brother to [Ts'ai Ching](#) (1046-1126). The degrading of Empress Meng was, therefore, part of the dismissal of Ssu-ma Kuang and his followers and the demotion of men who dared protest.⁵¹

Although the degrading of the two empresses can be clearly tied to the politics of the times, official records of the period do not state this. The official reasons given in memorials and biographies of the women were jealousies within the palace and the barrenness of the two empresses. The political undertones can be found in biographies of men involved in the two incidents—men such as [Lü I-chien](#) and [Chang Tun](#). In both instances, the Chinese bureaucracy opposed the deposings and objected to the emperor replacing the empresses with women from the harem. The ultimate blame, however, was placed upon men who had assisted the emperors in their actions while the emperors were said to have regretted following their advice. The empresses are also pictured as innocent victims. In both cases, the women were reinstated—Kuo-shih posthumously by her own husband while Meng-shih was reinstated by her brother-in-law, Hui-tsung.

The extension of power to imperial relatives is predicated on the

Chinese ideal that the ruler should not trouble himself with specific decisions and actions of government but leave all such matters to the care of ministers selected, theoretically at least, on the basis of merit. Palace women were thus able to both wield power and share it with their family members by gaining official posts for them and their allies. Hence, restraining imperial relatives was a topic discussed often in memorials to the emperors. This is exemplified by the many memorials written on the subject of palace women and imperial relatives in the *Chü-ch'en tsou-i* (collection of Sung memorials).⁵²

There were two categories of imperial relatives. The first included those powerful families whose women entered the palace as a result of alliance-type marriages. Unless they abused their privileges, these relatives did not arouse the hostilities of officials. An example of one who did abuse his relationship as brother-in-law to the emperor was Wang Chi-hsün (c.963). Although Wang was the son of a regional commandant, he came under attack when he became arrogant after his sister's marriage to T'ai-tsu. Hated by everyone at court, Wang was safe as long as his sister was living; after her death, he was stripped of his powers and forced into retirement. In his frustration at being ousted from his high offices, he was alleged to have killed his attendants and slaves for sadistic pleasure. When T'ai-tsung ascended the throne he ordered that Wang be executed.⁵³

Many of the biographies of imperial relatives descended of official families were not classified under the imperial relatives (*wai-ch'i*) section of the *Sung-shih* (history of the Sung) but integrated with those of officials who had performed meritorious services. Although the advancement of their women was not responsible for their successes in office, it did serve to prolong the official status of these families for a few more generations. For example, Fu Wei-chung (c. 1040), a third generation descendant of Empress Fu, wife of T'ai-tsung, was recorded as having received his appointment to office because he was an imperial relative. He was posthumously named Defense Commandant. The appointment of Fu Wei-chung to office as a third generation descendant of the empress' family also assured that his descendants could, for a few generations continue to serve in the civil service through protection (*yin*).⁵⁴

Imperial relatives descended of prominent families were, therefore, able to maintain their positions of power by having their women marry into the palace. The best illustration of this is the family of Li Ming-te. When her father died, the family was in disgrace and living in poverty. Her marriage to T'ai-tsung was arranged as part of the reparations made to her family and after being named empress, Li was able to reverse the declining fortunes of the family. She accomplished this by gaining appointments for her brothers, their

sons, and grandsons, to the extent that her nephew, Li Chao-liang (c.1048) was able to play an important role in government for over 40 years after the empress' death and was posthumously named Chief Councilor.⁵⁵

That imperial relatives descended of official families could maintain themselves in power despite objections from the bureaucracy can be seen by examining the biographies of Hsiang Tsung-liang (c.1100) and Hsiang Tsung-huai (c.1100), brothers of Empress Dowager Hsiang. These two men were descended of an illustrious lineage. Their great-grandfather Hsiang Min-chung (c.1060) was chief councilor to Chen-tsung and their father had served as regional commandant of Ting-kuo military prefecture. Their sister, Hsiang-shih, was personally selected by Empress Dowager Kao to be the principal consort of Shen-tsung. Both Tsung-liang and Tsung-huai were attacked for their promotions and performances in office, for attracting a following which curried their favor because of their relationship to the palace, and for their friendship with Ts'ai Ching. Memorials were written to Empress Dowager Hsiang in 1100 asking her to restrain her relatives who were abusing their privileged positions.⁵⁶

Not all women from official family backgrounds utilized their positions to advance their family members. Women such as Empresses Kuo, Ts'ao, and Kao refused to give offices to their relatives. The biography of Kuo Chung-jen (c.1000), brother of Empress Kuo, wife of Chen-tsung, stressed that his accomplishments were his own and did not depend on his status as an imperial relative, since his sister was adamant that no favors be granted to her family members. Another example is illustrated by a memorial to Ying-tsung asking that he submit to Empress Dowager Ts'ao's wishes that no favors be granted to members of her family. Yet, despite this precaution, the Ts'ao family was able to maintain national prominence for at least another generation. Empress Kao was also recorded as having restrained Ying-tsung from elevating her brother to high positions. His promotion to regional commandant was awarded posthumously. No apparent reason can be found for the refusal of these women to elevate their relatives to high offices. It might be argued that their behavior was in keeping with Confucian teaching and that they honestly believed imperial relatives should be kept out of politics. It can also be argued that these women may have had either casual or antagonistic relationships with their family members and so did not want to advance them. Unfortunately, there is no evidence in the biographies or historical documents to prove either argument since the records praise these women only for behaving correctly.⁵⁷

The second category of imperial relatives to attain high positions were those from obscure backgrounds who had risen to

power through the advancement of their female relatives. These relatives were the most censored by the Chinese bureaucracy which feared their intrusion into politics. Four empresses from obscure backgrounds were able to elevate their families to positions of national prominence. The first to do so was Empress Dowager Liu who owed her entry into the palace to the recommendations of the silver merchant, [Kung Mei—who later changed his name to Liu Mei in order to establish himself as brother to the empress and not as her former husband or procurer as had been rumored](#). Since Empress Liu had no known family of her own she repeatedly honored her professed brother and his family by giving him, his sons, his son-in-law, and his grandson, numerous important offices. When Empress Liu became regent, she posthumously honored three generations of Liu Mei's immediate ancestors, and, at his death she ordered the court to recess officially, mourning him for three days.

Another man who benefited from his alliance with Liu-shih was the retainer [Chang Ch'i](#) who had shielded her when she was ordered out of Chen-tsung's feudal palace by T'ai-tsung. Chang Ch'i had begun serving Chen-tsung at the age of 11 and was especially favored by both the emperor and his favorite for his faithful services. Chang Ch'i was repeatedly promoted until he achieved the rank of regional commandant and was posthumously honored as grand tutor. All of his 32 sons and grandsons were given official posts and his family was able to enter civil service for the next three generations through protection.⁵⁸

The next woman from an obscure family background to successfully obtain official positions for her family was Empress Dowager Yang who was able to maintain the much criticised [Yang Ching-tsung \(c.1040\) in power](#). Han Ch'i, in a memorial to Jen-tsung in 1058, stated that Yang Ching-tsung had no merit of his own but had acquired all of his offices and advancements via his relationship to the empress dowager. Han Ch'i further stated that Yang was lustful, unreasonable, and disrespectful. The memorial went on to say that historical documents reveal that the empress' clique had a tendency, as a body, to go with the foolish elements and had to be constantly restrained from excessive power. The biography of Yang Ching-tsung states that Jen-tsung also thought him lustful, greedy, unreasonable, and disrespectful; yet, despite objections from both the bureaucracy and the emperor, Empress Dowager Yang was able to maintain her cousin in his position.⁵⁹

The relatives of Empress Li Yüan-te, the natural mother of Jen-tsung, also prospered from their relationship to the emperor. After Jen-tsung discovered the true identity of his mother, he searched for her family, appointing her brother, [Li Yung-ho \(c.1040\), and his sons](#)

to important positions in the military. Memorials were written to the emperor objecting to these appointments since they had not been awarded on the basis of merit. Empress dowagers, especially those who ruled as regents, were the most influential in obtaining official posts for members of their families. Because of this Empress Meng was able to advance her nephew, Meng Chung-hou (c.1126), appointing him regional commandant, and have positions awarded to five other relatives.⁶⁰

It may be argued that empress dowagers were powerful because they were the mothers of the reigning monarchs and could influence their sons. Although it is true that emperors were required to be filial to empress dowagers, few reigning monarchs were the natural sons of these powerful women. Of the empress dowagers under study only [Li Chang-i](#), [Kao-shih](#), and [Wei-shih](#) were the natural mothers of the reigning monarchs and only the latter two lived to enjoy their privileged positions. The other women were either principal consorts or favorites of the previous emperors who had been established as empresses by their husbands. The only exception was Yang-shih, who was named empress dowager for the special role she had played in the upbringing of Jen-tsung.

The only imperial consort recorded as having gained important positions for her family members and her allies was [Chang-shih \(2\)](#), who retained Jen-tsung's love until her death. Because of the emperor's love for her, she had great influence and was able to obtain official posts for her brother, [Chang Hua-chi](#), and her uncle, [Chang Yao-tso](#) (d.c. 1054). The favors shown to Chang-shih (2) generated a great deal of criticism from the Chinese bureaucracy. This can be seen in a memorial written in 1042 objecting to the elaborate presents bestowed upon Chang-shih (2) on the birth of her daughter. The memorial said that palace women had a tendency to become arrogant if overly favored by the emperor and that although Chang-shih (2) had come from a good family such largesse was still dangerous as it could cause talk. It went on to say that Jen-tsung had already honored her mother twice within the last four or five days and that he was becoming too intimate with her relatives. Furthermore, it stated that before Chang-shih (2) had won imperial favor, her relatives were not interested in her but now they all flocked around her. It was suggested that the best way to preserve Chang-shih (2) from corruption was not shower her with presents.

The imperial favors shown Chang-shih (2) through official appointments and advancements to her brother and her uncle generated even greater opposition. Her ally and friend, [Wen Yen-po](#) (1006-1097), was accused of having risen through her influence. [Chang-shih \(2\)](#) prevailed despite opposition from powerful men in the

bureaucracy. Many of the men who opposed her, her uncle, and her ally, were demoted or exiled. Among them was Sung Ch'i (998-1061), a Hanlin academician, who had incurred her wrath by refusing to write into her promotion decree a special ceremony the emperor had ordered.⁶¹

The above discussions of the different facets of power of palace women aptly illustrate the definition of political power expressed earlier—the capacity for obtaining honors and advancements for oneself, one's family, as well as one's allies. It also conforms to the negative definition—that political power is the capacity for removing one's enemies from power or the ability to thwart their wishes by maintaining one's position in the face of their opposition. Besides such expressions of power as the functional powers of female officials within their specified offices, the bureaucracy's recognition of the power of palace women, the power of wet nurses, the power to being able to secure positions, and the extension of power to imperial relatives, there was also the direct political power exercised by the five female regents.

Chapter 5

POWER AND PRESTIGE

The sovereign power of the Northern Sung ruler was absolute in legal theory, although in its political and practical applications it was subject to conditions and limitations imposed upon it by Confucian ideology. This sovereign power worked so well in the Northern Sung that it was not infringed upon by usurping ministers, by relatives of palace women, or by palace eunuchs. Female rulers acting as regents attempted to possess the same sovereign power as the emperors. Lien-sheng Yang, in "Female Rulers in Imperial China," discusses the regent empress dowagers as chiefs of state, saying that many of the regents wanted to be recognized as the sovereign or supreme ruler even though their wishes were not always carried out. Sung officials insisted that regents, in issuing edicts, use the character "t'ung," meaning "together with, jointly," in order to emphasize the principle that the emperor, even though a minor or ill, remained sovereign.¹

Political Power

The Chinese regency, as an institution, was not sanctioned by written law but was recognized by unwritten law. Although the regency, as a dynastic institution, was constantly under criticism, it was repeatedly resorted to in times of emergency and for reasons of expediency all through Chinese history. During the Northern Sung there was a total of five regencies, under Empress Dowagers Liu, Ts'ao, Kao, Hsiang, and Meng.

Lien-sheng Yang further states that there are three historical conditions under which an empress could act as regent. The first condition was when the emperor was too young to govern. The exact age of the minority of the emperor is difficult to determine, but Yang maintains that 17 (*sui*) seemed to have been the acceptable norm. The second condition was when the emperor was ill and unable to attend to affairs; and the third was when the emperor was unexpectedly removed. The conditions under which the five regencies in the Northern Sung were established confirm the three findings of Lien-sheng Yang. Empress Dowagers Liu, Kao, and Hsiang all ruled because of the minority of the emperors. Liu-shih was made regent because Jen-tsung was only 12 when he succeeded to the throne. Despite calls for her retirement, Empress Dowager Liu continued to rule until her death in 1033. Although Jen-tsung was 23 when the regent died, she

left a will stipulating that her friend, Yang-shih (1), should succeed as regent. Her wishes were not honored since neither the emperor nor his ministers were willing to tolerate another regency. The opposition of the ministers was voiced by Fan Chung-yen who stated that the people would feel strange if they were to be "mothered" again by another regent immediately after the death of the previous one.²

Supreme Empress Dowager Kao was also made regent because of the minority of the emperor – her grandson was only nine when he succeeded to the throne. Beginning her regency in 1085, Kao-shih ruled until her death in 1093 although there were calls for her retirement the year before.³ The fact that Supreme Empress Dowager Kao, rather than Empress Dowager Hsiang, was made regent indicates that the office of regent was probably the prerogative of the most senior living empress dowager.

The second finding of Lien-sheng Yang, that the regency would be established if the emperor was too ill to rule, is illustrated by regency of Empress Dowager Ts'ao who ruled for the first year of Ying-tsung's reign since he was in poor health. The third finding, that a regency would be established if the emperor was suddenly removed, is exemplified by the regencies of Empress Dowagers Hsiang and Meng. Hsiang assumed her regency when Che-tsung died suddenly leaving no heir to the throne. She was to rule for only six months while supervising the selection of the next emperor. Similarly, Meng was made regent in 1127 when the two Sung emperors, Hui-tsung and Ch'in-tsung, were captured and taken into exile by the Chin. As regent, Empress Dowager Meng issued a proclamation enthroning an imperial prince, [Kao-tsung, as emperor, thus founding the Southern Sung](#).

In "An Administrative Cycle in Chinese History," James T. C. Liu divides the Northern Sung emperors into three types: 1) the organizing-type like T'ai-tsu and T'ai-tsung, who exercised both the ultimate and executive power while their councilors had little power; 2) the maintenance- or normalcy-type emperors like Chen-tsung and Jen-tsung, who relied heavily upon the services of able statesmen; and 3) the reforming-type like Ying-tsung and Shen-tsung. Shen-tsung was said to have been almost as energetic as the organizing-type emperors at the beginning of the dynasty, enlarging the scope of his executive power and facilitating implementation of the reforms of Wang An-shih by giving him full support and by dismissing many of the officials who opposed him.⁴

The patterns for regencies which emerge in the Northern Sung indicate that female rulers can also be similarly divided into types. Regents like Empress Dowagers Liu and Kao were able to consolidate their power and govern as de facto sovereigns during their lengthy reigns. They both held court with the young emperors behind lowered

screens, assumed imperial prerogatives of setting up special names on the occasions of their birthdays, sent envoys in their own names to the Chin, and refused to retire even after the emperors had come of age. Thus, Empress Dowagers Liu and Kao both exercised sovereign power through direct rule, utilizing their ministers as executive assistants – similar in many ways to the organizing-type and reforming-type emperors described by James T. C. Liu.

Empress Dowager Liu, undoubtedly the most ambitious and aggressive of the Northern Sung regents, had risen to the heights of power by her control over both Chen-tsung and Jen-tsung. Her power can be illustrated by her ability to ally with certain officials and to dismiss others who opposed her. The first man to fall victim to her power was [Yang I \(974-1030\) who had been asked by Chen-tsung to draft the edict proclaiming Liu-shih his empress. Yang I had refused, objecting to her unsuitable background and stating that she was unfit to be the mother of the people. On learning this, Liu-shih was determined to avenge herself. Later, she was able to ally herself with several officials and managed to have Yang I dismissed on grounds of factionalism.](#)⁵

The next example of Liu-shih's power can be seen on her assumption of sovereign power as regent. Two years previously, in 1020, Chen-tsung had fallen ill and his empress had unofficially taken over the de facto administration of the empire. Several of the ministers intervened and successfully persuaded the emperor to name the heir-apparent as regent with K'ou Chun serving as grand tutor for the duration of the emperor's illness. When Chen-tsung died in 1022, [K'ou Chün and his friends again tried to keep the empress dowager from assuming sovereign power as regent. This time their effort was doomed as Liu-shih had obtained the assistance of Ting Wei \(969-1040\). Once named regent, Liu-shih asked for the execution of K'ou Chun for having opposed her. She was, however, persuaded not to carry out that vindictive command by Ting Wei who remonstrated saying that the people would be alienated if the regent's act was the execution of the former emperor's trusted minister. Empress Dowager Liu acquiesced to her advisors and instead banished and demoted K'ou Chun and his friends.](#)

During Liu-shih's regency she assumed the role of sovereign to the extent that she even performed the ritual ceremonial plowing and ancestral worship in the Temple of the Imperial Ancestors. Both these acts were the prerogatives of the emperor alone. Ruling supreme, she alone made the final decisions on state policies and on the delegation of power and functioned much like the organizing-type emperors described by James T. C. Liu. She was praised, however, for listening to her advisors and for utilizing the services of able men. Although

Empress Dowager Liu allowed debate at court, she was ruthless in punishment of her critics. The most outspoken ones were sometimes dismissed to the provinces. An official who asked the regent to retire in 1028 was similarly dealt with. Yet, Liu-shih was also willing to forgive her enemies if they showed true repentance; she reinstated Li Ti (c. 1022) after he admitted that he had erred in cooperating with K'ou Chun and publicly stated that the regent was acting in the best interests of the young emperor. Empress Dowager Liu was also open to advice and criticism from those whom she believed acted with her interests at heart. We have already discussed her acceptance of advice to banish rather than to execute K'ou Chün. She also tolerated the remonstrations of Lü Tsung-tao and limited the power of her relatives, in part due to his constantly reminding her not to be another Empress Wu (whom he referred to as the "criminal of the T'ang"). In 1027, on the advice of Lü, Liu-shih decided against following the example of Empress Wu, who had had seven temples erected in her honor. When the natural mother of Jen-tsung died in 1030, Empress Dowager Liu wanted to have the woman buried as an ordinary palace woman. Instead, she accepted Lü I-chien's suggestion that she bury the woman in a manner befitting the mother of an emperor in order to prevent future repercussions. This act was responsible for easing the wrath of Jen-tsung when he discovered the true identity of his mother, had her grave opened, and found her buried as befitted an empress.⁶

The other regent who ruled as de facto sovereign in a manner reminiscent of the reforming-type emperor was Supreme Empress Dowager Kao. Kao-shih had come from a family in the north that had served the Sung imperial house for several generations. Her great-grandfather had been a bandit who surrendered to the forces of the founding emperor and lived to serve two emperors as a regional commandant. His two sons also served the Sung within the military service. Kao-shih's grandfather served three emperors, T'ai-tsung, Chen-tsung, and Jen-tsung, attaining the rank of regional commandant. Kao-shih's father had been a militia commandant.

Kao-shih did not have a distinguished career as empress. It was not until she became regent that she acquired power. As empress dowager she had disagreed with her son's policies of reform and with his almost unshakeable faith in Wang An-shih, but she had little influence over her son. She was able to put her own ideas into effect only when her son died in 1085, leaving her young grandson as emperor. On assuming the regency, Kao-shih pursued an anti-reform policy, putting the conservatives into power.

During her regency, Supreme Empress Dowager Kao managed to utilize both eunuchs and faithful officials in carrying out her anti-reform policies. The eunuchs had turned against Wang-An-shih

during the previous reign because he had repeatedly warned the emperor against allowing them to influence policy. Wang An-shih had also prohibited the eunuchs from any official contact with the State Trade System and the Guild Exempt Tax, thus depriving them of income from bribes and other corrupt activities. Furthermore, when the eunuchs tried to offset their losses by asking for higher pay, citing the increase in the clerk's wages as precedent, Wang An-shih persuaded Shen-tsung to turn down their request even though the emperor himself liked the eunuchs for their "smooth" service and favored the pay increase. The eunuchs also made their resentment against Wang obvious by interpreting certain astronomical omens as indicating the desirability of dismissing Wang and replacing him with someone from the north. During the regency of Supreme Empress Dowager Kao, the eunuchs were entrusted with the imperial seal and the power to handle state papers whenever the regent became ill.

Kao-shih's first act as regent was to recall the conservative Ssu-ma Kuang to the capital to head the government. With his assistance and that of his followers, she successfully reversed the revolutionary measures of the last reign. In 1089 she recalled Lü Kung-chu, son of Lü I-chien, asking him to head the government jointly with Ssu-ma Kuang. She also utilized other men who had either distinguished themselves in their opposition to Wang An-shih or had studied under Ssu-ma Kuang. These anti-reformers held power for the duration of the regency (1085-1093) and diligently weeded from the bureaucracy those who had supported the reforms. They went so far as to order the National Academy, which had been greatly influenced by Wang's ideas, to admit no more students. Meanwhile, they hoped the appointment of their own followers to the prefectural schools would change the intellectual atmosphere and political opinion among the student population.

As regent, Supreme Empress Dowager Kao was extremely strict with her relatives, refusing to grant them special treatment. One of her uncles had been demoted from his position as general for leading an unsuccessful military offensive and when she was asked to forgive him and restore him to his former position, she refused and the uncle was not reinstated until after her death. Another uncle was a scholar who avoided official service in order not to antagonize his niece, since he was well acquainted with her reputation of dealing severely with imperial relatives. Because of the regent's rigid adherence to her policy of not granting special favors to her relatives, neither her uncles nor her brother were given any honors during her lifetime. After her death Che-tsung posthumously honored his relatives from the family of his grandmother.⁷

Supreme Empress Dowager Kao performed so well as regent – in

both her use of officials and in her curb of imperial relatives – that historians praised her as being a sage among women. The young emperor, however, was quite unhappy during the regency. He had adored his father and sympathized with the reformers who had nominated him as heir-apparent. He disliked the conservatives who exerted pressure on him to continue their anti-reform policies. He was further antagonized by his domineering grandmother's choice of a principal consort for him. Therefore, when his grandmother died, the young emperor immediately recalled the reformers to power.⁸

The other regents, Empress Dowagers Ts'ao, Hsiang, and Meng were less secure in their short reigns; they were less aggressive and kept low profiles. Ts'ao and Hsiang both attended to business in small halls with screens in front of them, assuming no imperial prerogatives. Empress Dowager Meng first assumed power during the chaos of the puppet government until Kao-tsung was strong enough to rally support and be proclaimed the legitimate emperor. She was to assume the regency a second time when Kao-tsung had to abdicate temporarily. These three female rulers did not relish dominating the court; they relied upon their ministers, rubber-stamped the decisions made by the bureaucracy, and generally behaved like the maintenance-type emperors described by Professor Liu.

Empress Dowager Ts'ao, granddaughter of a founding general, was well accepted by the officials even when she assisted Jen-tsung in governing during his illness. Her official biography further credits her with saving the emperor's life during an uprising of the palace guards (the same account is given in the biography of Chang-shih (2) crediting her with the act). Since the emperor had no surviving heir, Ts'ao-shih was charged with the upbringing of his adopted heir, Ying-tsung, from the time he was four. When it came time to choose a principal consort for the adopted heir, Ts'ao-shih selected her own sister's daughter, Kao-shih, and when Jen-tsung died in 1063, Ying-tsung was declared emperor and Kao-shih was named empress.

Ying-tsung was ailing when he succeeded to the throne at the age of 32 and the officials asked that Empress Dowager Ts'ao be declared regent and co-ruler behind the lowered screen. Ying-tsung soon recovered and wished to resume his reign but the empress dowager was not prepared to resign and relinquish her power. Numerous memorials were written asking for her retirement but she steadfastly refused. Finally, Han Ch'i—an outspoken critic of the regent—asked that the screen be removed while the court was in session and the regent was forced to flee. Her retirement was thus effectively obtained.

Emperor Ying-tsung had ruled for only four years when he became ill again and was asked by the officials to abdicate in favor of

his 20-year old son, Shen-tsung. The following year Ying-tsung died and Ts'ao-shih was named Supreme Empress Dowager. Although Shen-tsung was extremely fond of Ts'ao-shih and was willing to listen to her counsel, his desire to regain the territory held by the Liao drove him into an alliance with Wang An-shih against her. She was, however, successful in interceding on Su Shih's behalf when he was thrown into prison for lampooning his colleagues in verse. On the advice of the supreme empress dowager, Shen-tsung had [Su Shih \(1036-1101\)](#) released from prison but dismissed to Hang-chou. When Ts'ao-shih died at 64, Shen-tsung honored her family, naming her brother chief councilor and giving over forty official positions to members of her family. This was perhaps made necessary by the fact that Ts'ao-shih had insisted, throughout her life, that no favors be granted to members of her family. Shen-tsung may have decided to compensate them after her death.⁹

Empress Dowager Hsiang was also descended from an official family and was the great-granddaughter of a man who had served as chief councilor under Chen-tsung. [Hsiang-shih had been personally chosen as principal consort by her mother-in-law, Kao-shih, and felt loyal to her. When her husband died, Kao-shih was made regent and Hsiang-shih dutifully stayed in the background. After the death of the supreme empress dowager, Chang Tun](#) convinced Che-tsung to demote the former regent posthumously and to reduce all her clan to commoners. On learning this Hsiang-shih became extremely agitated and tearfully entreated the emperor to destroy the already written edict. Che-tsung was touched by her concern and burned the edict in her presence.

Hsiang-shih was made regent when Che-tsung died leaving no heir. One of her first acts as regent was to dismiss [Chang Tun and Ts'ai Pien, both of whom had had great influence over Che-tsung \(Chang Tun was probably punished for having induced the emperor to decree the posthumous deposing of Kao-shih as well as for the degrading of Empress Meng\). When Empress Dowager Hsiang died at the age of 56, Hui-tsung honored her family by posthumously advancing three generations of her immediate ancestors and awarding the title of king to two of her cousins.](#)¹⁰

The fifth and last Northern Sung regent, Empress Dowager Meng, had the unique distinction of co-ruling twice. The granddaughter of a defense commandant, Meng-shih was summoned into the palace at 16, won the hearts of both Kao-shih and Hsiang-shih, and was named empress. Unfortunately, her husband was enamored of another palace woman and eventually had her deposed and sent into the nunnery. Thus, when the [Chin captured the capital carrying away the two emperors, Hui-tsung and Ch'in-tsung, and the](#)

entire court, Meng-shih was not living at the palace and was able to evade capture. On seizing the capital, the Chin placed their puppet, Chang Pang-ch'ang (d.c. 1130) on the throne and departed with their captives. After the departure of the Chin, Chang Pang-ch'ang realized he had no popular support and was extremely vulnerable since the Chin troops were no longer stationed at Kaifeng. Chang then decided to legitimize his reign naming Meng-shih regent.

Shortly after Empress Dowager Meng was named regent, Kao-tsung, a son of Hui-tsung, arrived at Kaifeng. On learning this, Meng-shih immediately declared him the legitimate emperor and retired as regent. Two years later, in 1129, when Kao-tsung was defeated in battle at Yang-chou and narrowly escaped capture, two discontented leaders of his bodyguards forced him to abdicate in favor of his three-year-old son, with Meng-shih again serving as regent. Eventually, his loyal followers were able to subjugate the bodyguards and re-establish Kao-tsung as emperor. Throughout this entire occurrence, Meng-shih acted as regent with great reluctance and was most happy to retire again.

Kao-tsung was said to have felt very indebted to Empress Dowager Meng for twice keeping the throne in readiness for him and for graciously retiring each time he was able to muster the strength to regain the throne. Treating her as if she was his own mother, the emperor generously rewarded her with positions for her relatives, naming approximately 80 of them to posts when she died at the age of 53.¹¹

The five Northern Sung regents thus differed in their style of rule. Empress Dowagers Liu and Kao wanted recognition as the sovereign or supreme ruler and were de facto chiefs of state. The other three regents, Empress Dowagers Ts'ao, Hsiang, and Meng acted in the capacity of heads of governments, leaving the business of governing to officials and generally maintaining equilibrium until the emperors themselves could resume the reins of government. During the Northern Sung, the Chinese viewed the regency as joint-rule, "*t'ung*," between the empress dowager and the emperor even though the power may have been entirely in the hands of the regent. Another perspective on the regency, in the case of youthful emperors like the three-year-old son of Kao-tsung, was that of tutoring the emperor in government indicated by the term "*hsün-cheng*."

Regardless of the style of the five Northern Sung regents, female rule was recognized by the Chinese bureaucracy and through the institution of the regency, women were able to exercise direct political power. The Chinese bureaucracy was forced to accept the regency without sanction of written law, both for purposes of practicality and by reason of "mother right," the byproduct of the observation of filial

Social Prestige

The social theorist Edward Shils explains social prestige in terms of deferment-entitlement. Its properties may be identified as power, occupational role, wealth, style of life, kinship connections, and other related factors. The preceding sections of this work have suggested that palace women possessed functional power. They were able to uplift their families socially and politically, to advance themselves within the civil service hierarchy, to secure positions for their relatives and allies, and to influence the politics of their times. This influence was exerted not only indirectly by reason of the women's closeness to the emperor and their ability to surround him with advisors who owed their allegiance to the women, but also directly, by those empresses who ruled as regents during the minority of an emperor, the illness of an emperor, or times of emergency and expediency. These factors make it apparent that palace women possessed the first and most important property of deferment-entitlement.

Another key element of social prestige is occupational role. All Chinese historical documents refer to women working in the administrative structure of the palace as female officials. These female officials were graded according to the same classifications as male officials in the bureaucracy. The question is whether the bureaucracy considered these classifications as equal. For example, did an official consider a woman graded 1a to be of the same status as a male official of the same rank? This question can be answered by examining a memorial written in 1062 on posthumous honors bestowed upon the ancestors of imperial consorts who were graded 1a.

The memorial written to Jen-tsung by [Ssu-ma Kuang](#) objected to granting posthumous honors to three generations of Chang-shih (2)'s immediate ancestors, arguing that while there was a living empress no secondary wife should be awarded the same privilege that was the right of the principal consort. Since empresses were usually granted the honor of having posthumous advancements bestowed on three generations of their immediate ancestors, the author suggested that imperial consorts be awarded a maximum of posthumous honors for two generations of their immediate ancestors. He further proposed that a similar distinction of privileges be made for male officials, suggesting that the privilege of having posthumous honors granted to three generations of immediate ancestors be reserved only for chief councilors, graded 1a, and for commissioners of military affairs, graded 1b, while the privilege of having posthumous honors granted to two generations of ancestors be designated for officials who were in

the same category as assistant executive of the secretary-chancellery (assistant civil councilors of state), graded 2a.¹² This memorial seems to imply that the author viewed male officials graded 1a and 1b as deserving the same privileges as the empress, while male officials graded 2a were to have the same privileges as imperial consorts graded 1a. In effect, he was lowering the female officials by one grade in comparison to males. Jen-tsung, however, did not accept this advice and the awarding of posthumous honors to Chang-shih (2)'s ancestors proceeded with no change. The concept that the emperor and the empress, the father and mother of the people, were above classification was not changed. Therefore, this official did not succeed in his attempt to equate the empress with male officials graded 1a and 1b, nor was he able to equate female officials graded 1a with male officials graded 2a. His concept that the status of female officials was one grade below that of males was perhaps shared by many of his colleagues but official classification did not allow for such differentiation.

According to Chao Feng-chieh's *Chung-kuo fu-nü tsai-fa-lü shang chih ti-wei* (the position of Chinese women in law), the status of a woman was the reflected status of her husband. Consequently, a woman whose husband was graded 1a was socially superior to another whose husband was graded 2a. Presumably, wives of emperors also possessed the reflected status of their husbands and were theoretically superior to male officials graded 1a. This was apparently the view of Jen-tsung who ordered the wives of all the highest officials to pay special obeisance to his beloved Chang-shih (2) during a special ceremony advancing her to the rank of noble consort in 1049. This order irritated the bureaucracy and much debate ensued on the appropriateness of the act. The ministers finally acceded since, in response to a similar order, the wives of the highest officials had already offered their obeisance to her at the time of her advancement to One of Cultivated Beauty, graded 1b. Although the officials agreed to allow their wives to pay special obeisance to Chang-shih (2) at the special ceremony elevating her to imperial consort of the first rank, they did so with great reluctance since they were, in effect, acknowledging social deference.¹³

The third element in determining social prestige is wealth. Women who served in the palaces were able to increase the wealth of their families since the families had access to remuneration and gifts given to their daughters. The extent of this economic gain depended on a particular woman's position and the amount of favors she received from the imperial persons she served. It depended on the gifts bestowed on a woman on the occasions of her advancements, the births of her children, the enfeoffments and marriages of her children,

and the gifts (some granted posthumously) that accompanied the honors granted to her family members.¹⁴

This improved economic position of the family, as well as the family's special relationship to the palace, led to an improved "style of life" that commanded respect in the local community. A consequence of this enhanced social standing was the possibility of intermarriage with the local gentry. Such marriages created valuable kinship connections. If the family had previously been poor and of low status such connections were especially valued since the endorsement of the local gentry was necessary before men were permitted to sit for the civil service examinations which was the avenue to success and social prestige. Economic gains might also give the family access to educational opportunities which had formerly been beyond their means. Education was another prerequisite for the men who wished to seek advancement through the civil service examination. Once the family was able to get one foot in the door of officialdom, it was able to ensure the social standing and political power of future generations through further educational opportunities, style of life, and kinship connections, as well as through the *yin* (protection) privilege.

Palace women in the Northern Sung thus met all the criteria suggested by Shils as indices of social prestige. They possessed all of the properties of deferment-entitlement—power, occupational role, wealth, style of life, and kinship connections.

Chapter 6

WOMEN, POLITICS, AND SOCIETY

The system of palace administration, the management of the affairs of imperial women, remained remarkably stable throughout the many Chinese dynasties. Palace women were employed, along with the eunuchs, in the conduct of all affairs pertaining to women in the inner palaces. These women worked in the public domain as serving women, career officials, consorts to emperors, and as rulers. The organization of palace women was amazingly independent and functioned extremely smoothly throughout the Northern Sung. Palace women were able to rise within the administrative hierarchy and some were promoted to the exalted office of empress. These women in China, therefore, had an avenue for a career and an alternative to marriage. This symbol of female power, the political power and social prestige of palace women, may perhaps in part be responsible for the development of female status and the relatively low level of sex antagonism in present-day China.

In dealing with the question of political power and social prestige of palace women, this book has looked at the social organization of palace women and found it to be independently structured and patterned on the Chinese civil service. The women were ranked similar to the male officials and had their own structure of advancement and retirement. Five different avenues of entry into palace service were found, some voluntary, some involuntary. These different methods of entry show that ambitious families were able to place their daughters in palace service in order to advance the family fortunes. It also seems clear that women who did not desire to serve could fail the many tests they had to undergo in qualifying for palace service. Ten conditions for advancement and promotion were also identified, discussed, and evaluated for their effectiveness.

Clearly, palace women did possess power. They possessed functional power within their prescribed positions of responsibilities. They possessed the power to uplift their families socially and politically. They possessed political power indirectly, through influencing their husbands, sons, and wards on the issues of the times as well as through the appointment of their own relatives and allies to positions within the bureaucracy. Finally, some of these women ruled as regents and acted as de facto heads of state in the same manner as

did the emperors of the Northern Sung.

These high-ranking women were able to accomplish their goals and exercise their power despite repeated objections from the bureaucracy. In fact, in the majority of the instances involving a direct confrontation between a woman and a male member of the bureaucracy, the woman won and her enemies were exiled from the capital. These women were able to override objections from powerful forces within the bureaucracy; they were able to prevent their enemies from obstructing them and their relatives from achieving power; they were able to maintain their own standing in the face of opposition. They, therefore, satisfy the definition of power as the capacity for achieving goals in the social or political systems. They also satisfy the negative definition – the capacity for removing one's enemies from power or the ability to thwart their wishes by maintaining one's position in the face of their opposition.

Not only did palace women possess power, they also benefited from the status of their occupational roles and their civil service ranking. These women possessed social prestige or the properties of deferment-entitlement. They were able to advance their families by means of their increased wealth. This increased wealth permitted their families to adopt the style of life of the privileged classes, enabling them to intermarry with the local gentry and thus acquire kinship connections. Their family members at times acquired official posts either through direct command of the emperor or through success in the examinations, a success based on the improved educational opportunities afforded them by their new wealth. Finally, entrance into the bureaucracy often ensured the position of a family for several generations since the descendants of the men originally granted offices were entitled to enter into civil service through protection (*yin*).

This scenario of women, power, and politics, which existed throughout Chinese history appears to contradict the Confucian role prescribed for women. Were palace women then aberrants of Chinese society? To be considered aberrants, these women would have to be shown to be deviants from the norm—the accepted social behavior pattern for Chinese women. One would then have to assume that a norm existed—that the average Chinese woman behaved in a certain manner. If a norm existed, one would not find a diversity of roles for Chinese women. Instead, the image of women in Chinese literature and writings about women in Chinese society would reflect this norm.

Those who feel palace women were aberrants of Chinese society point to the Confucian woman as the norm. They feel that Confucianism supports male supremacy; therefore, women who accrued power and lorded it over men were deviants.

That is too simplistic an answer. If we examine the ideology of

male and female relations in China, we will find Confucian thinking mitigated by Taoist and Buddhist thought. The existence of these conflicting schools of thought allowed for a diversity of roles for Chinese women rather than one norm of behavior. We will find that the Confucian woman was thought of as the ideal rather than the norm. The Chinese felt that women should strive to attain the ideal, and in so doing used the Confucian woman as a standard for measurement.

The Confucian attitude of male supremacy is usually illustrated by quoting one verse from the *Book of Songs* which speaks of the male child as one born to greatness and the female child as one born to servitude.¹ Another illustration often used is taken from the *I-Ching*, "As Heaven takes precedence over Earth, ruler over subject, strong over weak, men over women."² The reproductive function of woman is emphasized by a quotation from Mencius, "There are three unfilial acts, the greatest of which is to be without descendants."³ This quotation is also used to justify the taking of secondary wives if the principal one had not given birth to sons for the continuation of the lineage. The practice of polygamy is further rationalized by saying that since a woman can have only one heaven, she may not have more than one husband. Whereas, a man, being heaven, is free to have more than one wife. The submissiveness of women is also substantiated by her subscriptions to *san-ts'ung*⁴ and *ssu-te* – the threefold obediences to father, husband, and son and the four areas the woman had to pay special attention to: virtue, speech, appearance, and needlework. The woman's role in society, as defined by Confucians, is one of submission—of assuring peaceful and harmonious relations in a household which frequently included several concubines.

Women are thought to have internalized these values. Lady Pan Chao (d.116), the great Han historian, in her "Precepts for Women" (*nü-chieh*), which formed part of the 'female classics' basic to women's education until the end of the 19th Century, emphasized the submissive role of women. She taught that women should be subservient, diligent, and worthy of continuing her husband's lineage. In order to maintain subservience, a woman should be yielding, respectful, and reverential; she should put herself after others, not speak about her merits and not argue about her faults; she should bear reproach, endure slights, and always act with circumspection. To be diligent, a woman should retire late and rise early. She should not shirk exertion from dawn till dark nor argue about her private affairs; she should apply herself diligently to both difficult and easy tasks, always being neat and tidy. To be worthy of continuing her husband's lineage, a woman should behave decorously in serving her husband. She should be serene and self-possessed, shunning jests and laughter;

she should be careful in the preparation of sacrificial foods offered to the ancestors. Lady Pan felt if a woman possessed these three qualities, she would have an excellent reputation and need never fear degradation or insult. She further stressed the importance of educating women in the same manner as men in order to ensure that women know how to properly serve their husband. Lady Pan's definition of the ideal woman remained the model for all elite women until the beginning of the 20th Century.⁵

Lady Pan Chao's writings were included in the 'female classics' taught to all elite women so they would know correct Confucian behavior. The female classics also included biographies of virtuous women (*Lieh-nü chuan*) of preceding dynasties and other texts such as "women's analects" (*nü-lun*) written by Sung Jo-hua (c. 785) of the T'ang. Patterning it on the analects of Confucius, the author discussed the correct behavior of women with reference to learning, ritual behavior, serving parents, parents-in-law, husbands, and related matters. Elite women's education also consisted of studying clan regulations which spell out the correct behavior of all members of the family. Since it was also recognized that a woman must be erudite in order to please the scholarly man, she was also taught the classics, classical writing, poetry, philosophy, painting, and music. In the Sung, the advent of wood block printing facilitated learning and many women became famous for their painting, poetry, and calligraphy. Wives of scholarly officials took an active interest in the literary and artistic activities of their husbands.⁶

Literary accomplishments of Sung women were not always appreciated by their male peers. Ssu-ma Kuang, the great historian, is quoted as saying, "A woman without talent is virtuous," and the great orthodox Confucian, Chu Hsi – who placed on record strict Confucian interpretation of the classics – stressed the inferiority of women, teaching strict separation of the sexes and forbidding all manifestations of love. He also believed that women should preserve their chastity even after the death of their husbands and that it was better for a woman to starve than to remarry. In "Reflections of Things on Hand," he says,

"Between man and woman, there is an order of superiority and inferiority, and between husband and wife, there is a principle of who leads and who follows. This is a constant principle. If people are influenced by feelings, give free reins to desires, and act because of pleasure, a man will be driven by desires, and lose his character of strength, and a woman will be accustomed to pleasure and forget her duty of obedience. Consequently, there will be misfortune and neither will be benefitted. "⁷

Chinese law reflects much of Confucian thought. Legally, a woman was not permitted to share in the inheritance of the family except for what was given her at marriage. This was done to protect the family's property from designing sons-in-law. However, it stripped women of inheritance rights. A woman could not divorce her husband, while a man could divorce his wife for reasons of sterility, lewdness, disobedience to her in-laws, loquacity, theft, jealousy, and if she had a repulsive disease. To protect women from irresponsible husbands, the law also said that a woman could not be divorced if she had no close relatives to take her in, if she had worn mourning clothes for three years for her husband's parents, or if her husband had been poor at the time of marriage and had since then become wealthy. These provisions prevented men from irresponsibly discarding their wives. In the area of sex, the man had exclusive rights over his wife, whereas a woman had to share him with concubines if he so desired. A man also had exclusive labor rights over his wife but a woman was not responsible for the support of her parents after she married. The law also considered women as minors and in cases of crime – other than adultery or when the death penalty was involved – the woman was placed in the custody of her father or husband.⁸

Although Confucianism emphasizes the subordination of women to men in terms of family relationships, its effectiveness was neutralized by aspects of its own teaching as well as by other mitigating forces. For example, filial piety teaches that the son is to be subordinate to his parents. Thus, instead of a widow obeying her son, she, in her role as parent, actually rules and dominates him. The son, practicing filial piety, has no choice but be subordinate to his mother. Thus, Creel wrote, "The authority of the old woman of position in China is a thing which defies definition."⁹ Other mitigating forces, such as [Yin Yang, Taoism, and Buddhism, were also powerful forces in shaping the position of women in Chinese society.](#)

In the early Shang (c.1500-1100 B.C.) culture, women were greatly revered as mothers. They were associated with the color red, which stood for, among other things, sexual potency, creative powers, and happiness, while white, the color for the male, was the color for impotency, death, and negative influences.¹⁰ Scholars such as Robert Van Gulik have speculated that these symbols show early Chinese society to have been matrilineal and matriarchial in nature. Later alchemical treatises of the third century also credited women's essence, the Yin, with special rejuvenating and strengthening powers. At the same time, the Yin was subordinate to the Yang. It was believed that the Yin and the Yang produced everything in the universe. Yin, the negative principle, corresponded to shade, darkness, the moon, water, weakness or yielding, depth, and all things feminine. Yang, the

positive principle, corresponded to light, brightness, the sun, strength, fortitude, and all things masculine. One was passive, the other active; one submissive, the other dominant. Although they were antithetical to each other, each was indispensable and necessary.

Taoism emphasizes the importance of yin, the female principle, and the superiority of passivity over activity. Seeking to return to pristine simplicity, to a golden age where people lived long and happily – where there was no good nor evil, where everyone lived in harmony with nature, where yin and yang were united – Taoists venerated the female as she was considered to be closer to the primordial forces of nature than the male since it is in her womb that new life is created and fostered. Believing that the female possesses the indispensable element for achieving the elixir of life, it developed in Taoist sexual practices that the male seeks immortality by absorbing the female yin essence sending that, with his semen, through mental concentration, upward through the spinal cord into his brain. This knowledge was to be kept from the woman as she could achieve immortality at his detriment by reversing the procedure, draining him of his vital essence.¹¹

Buddhism teaches that both male and female could become a Buddha or a Bodhisattva. The Buddhist creed of universal love and compassion, preaching equality of all beings, appealed particularly to the spiritual needs of the Chinese woman. Responding to the need of a female deity, the compassionate goddess, [Kuan-yin, was converted from the male god, Avalokiteśvara. Buddhist temples served as a refuge for women who rejected marriage, as well as for wives and concubines who wanted to escape from cruel husbands or tyrannical mothers-in-law. Buddhist nuns, having free access to women's quarters, would counsel ladies of the household, officiate at prayer meetings, advise on cures, teach young girls reading, writing, and other needed skills. All of these conflicting attitudes towards women resulting from the teaching of filial piety, Taoist, and Buddhist beliefs, served to balance the more orthodox Confucian attitudes towards women in Chinese society.](#)¹²

Therefore, while the Confucian school teaches male supremacy, the Taoist teaches female superiority, and the Buddhist leans toward equality of the sexes. The existence of these different views allowed for tolerance of a diversity of roles for Chinese women. This diversity is evidenced by the proliferation of conflicting female stereotypes. We are well acquainted with three of the best known ones – the "sexually exploited female," the "dragon lady," and the "Confucian woman."

The stereotype of the sexually-exploited female can be traced to the courtesan in Chinese literature. Howard Levy, in his Introduction to *The Illusory Flame*, explains that the courtesan class, the predecessor

of the geisha in Japan, was trained from childhood in both intellectual and artistic pursuits. She is the antithesis of the wife who is trained in the domestic arts and moral precepts. In many Chinese stories, she emerges as the stronger personality, remaining true to her lover in face of adversity while he treats the alliance as a casual affair. The courtesan in Chinese literature is usually a beautiful young woman, a victim of circumstances, who falls in love with a young man who treats her with kindness and respect. She helps him pay his debts, purchases her freedom for him, then marries him either as wife or as concubine. Oftentimes, the young man betrays her love (as in "The Courtesan's Jewel Box"),¹³ sells her to another man, and the woman commits suicide. Sometimes, the young man proves worthy of her love (as in "The Oil Vendor and the Courtesan")¹⁴ and they live happily ever after on the wealth she had accumulated while plying her trade. At times, the heroine is not a courtesan but is a woman of a good family (as in "The Story of Ts'ui Ying Ying").¹⁵ After an affair with a promising young scholar, he leaves her never to return. She is, of course heartbroken by his betrayal.

The dragon lady, a dangerous, cunning, and powerful femme fatale, is a stereotype created out of images, projected by powerful palace women, over the last 2,000 years. This stereotype is often identified with the person and power of the Empress Dowager Tz'u-Hsi but is actually one that preceded her existence. Reaction to this stereotype is mixed. Some admire the dragon lady's decisiveness, ingenuity, and effectiveness. Others distrust her, finding her ruthless, cunning, and cruel. While many Chinese may find the dragon lady distasteful, she was never censured. And the stereotype continued.

The stereotype of the Confucian woman is a composite of what different Confucian sages have said about women. Since the female and her role in society was not a subject of consuming interest to Chinese philosophers, there are no treatises on that subject. The composite is made up of one or two statements attributed to different sages. For example, although nothing is known about the personal attitude of Confucius toward women, his followers quote him as saying, "Women and people of lowly stations are difficult to deal with. If you become too friendly with them, they become non-compliant; if you keep them at a distance, they turn resentful."¹⁶ As this attribution to Confucius is without context, we do not know if it was said in a serious discussion on women or if it was said after an unpleasant encounter with one.

The obedient daughter, the faithful wife, the sacrificing mother, characteristics of a Confucian woman, are qualities any man would find ideal. Similarly, the woman would find "the obedient son, the faithful husband, and the sacrificing father"- ideal. These sterling male

qualities are aired daily, through soap operas on American television, to a primarily female audience. Therefore, the characteristics and the behavior pattern of the Confucian woman, rather than being the average or the norm, are probably better classified as ideal. It is seen as a standard all women, especially educated women from gentry families, should strive for; a standard these women were measured by. If the behavior of the Confucian woman was the norm, manifestations of these attributes would not be uncommon. Those who embody these Confucian virtues need not be held up as role models and awarded places in both the local and national histories of China. It is precisely because few women achieved the ideal that sections on Virtuous Women (*Lieh-nü chuan*) were needed. Women who accomplished this feat had to be placed on pedestals so others can emulate them.

We can find writings by the Chinese pointing to women not observing Confucian rules of behavior. According to a third century Chinese philosopher, Ko Hung, women and girls "no longer engaged in spinning and weaving,

they do not like any longer to make cap tassels, they do not make hemp, but they love to gad about on the market place. They neglect the supervision of the kitchen but devote themselves to frivolous pleasures. They go out visiting to see their relatives, they proceed there by the light of the stars or carrying torches night after night..... Along the road those ladies indulge in unseemly jokes and prank..... These women also make pleasure trips to Buddhist temples, they go out to watch hunting and fishing..... They even travel beyond the district boundaries..... They proceed there in open carriages with curtains raised."¹⁷

Did women before or after Ko Hung's time observe Confucian rules of behavior? An examination of the poems in the *Book of Songs*, a Confucian classic supposedly compiled by Confucius himself, finds girls engaging in love affairs, refusing to marry their betrothed and eloping with their lovers – in other words, behaving like young women preoccupied with love. This preoccupation with love and survival is also found in *Eight Colloquial Tales of the Sung*,¹⁸ a compilation of stories popular during our period of study.

We know little about what women thought of their own position in society since most of the information we have on the subject comes from men who controlled the printed word. Strict Confucian segregation of the sexes divided life into two different spheres – private/domestic and public. This kind of division can be seen in most cultures. Anthropologist Peggy Sanday says that the biological makeup of humans means that the task of reproduction fell to the female which in turn imposed a constraint on the proportion of female

energy which could be expended in the areas of subsistence and defense, thereby increasing the probability that energy for tasks within those areas be drawn from males. Since activities in the areas of subsistence and defense provides greater accessibility to and control over strategic resources, it results in the conferment of higher status on persons engaged in these areas thus accounting for the relatively higher status of men in most cultures and male control over society and politics.¹⁹ Historical records indicate Chinese women worked in, and belonged to, the private/domestic sphere. There appears to have been no encouragement of women to enter the public sphere. There was no law against women holding public office – not even a Salic Law. Men and women appeared to know their places in society and operated within their own spheres. Since the two spheres operated independently, with little intrusion upon each other, men and women had power and position within their own spheres.

Confucian segregation of the sexes did not preclude women engaging in trade, magic, and the entertaining professions. Service in the palace was another accepted occupation for women. Palace women in China were not seen as intruding into the public sphere since most of their work was either serving other women or assisting family members. Many men who resented palace women were against their accruing power and allying themselves with hostile political elements. Other men found it convenient and useful to support and ally themselves with palace women since it served their own political ends. This is why we find men of the stature of Ssu-ma Kuang supporting female regents like Empress Dowager Kao. The opponents of powerful women could protest and complain but had no legal nor moral grounds to remove the women.

Since Chinese law also confers upon a woman the same status held by her husband, it is more valuable to discuss women in terms of different social and economic classes. Albert O'Hara has suggested dividing women in China into four classes: slaves and laboring women, wives of farmers and merchants, wives of scholars and officials, and wives of nobles and rulers.²⁰ Within each class responsibilities and privileges of women differed. It is, therefore, important to understand that subservience of women to men did not mean total subordination of all women to all men but the subordination of specific women to specific men within their own class, and only in terms of personal and family relationships.

It is also important to note that while the specific modes of behavior for women were spelled out in clan rules, the discussions involve only the woman's obligations as child, wife, and mother. Clan rules did not prohibit women from adopting other roles in addition to the three basic ones. Therefore, women's position as discussed by

Confucian ideology and legal codes and clan rules, relate only to personal and family relationships and did not preclude a diversity of roles for women in Chinese society.

The existence of a diversity of roles for women in society serves to substantiate the hypothesis that the Confucian role for women was more the ideal than the norm. If it was not the norm, then women who did not prescribe to it could not be considered deviants of society. However, it would be overly simplistic to dismiss the Confucian role as being only an ideal. To do so would not do it justice since society did try to mold women into that role. It would be closer to the truth to describe it as being a standard of measurement. Just as the Chinese measured men, societies, and cultures against Confucian teachings, women were also judged according to the Confucian criteria. Women, themselves, also rationalized their behavior in terms of Confucian justifications.

It is, therefore, important to understand that palace women did subscribe to the Confucian roles for women since the prescriptions apply to women being good daughters, wives, and mothers. Palace women who wielded power, functional or political, were still good daughters (carried out their duties within their specific offices), good wives (looked after the needs of the emperor), and good mothers (guided and looked after the welfare of their children and their subordinates).

Furthermore, Confucianism defines the nation in family terms, with the emperor and the empress at the head of the family as the parents of the people. Therefore, the female ruler had to be accorded the same filial piety as that owed the mother by her children – the heir-apparent, the ministers, and the people. While consorts (non-empresses), who meddled in politics were frowned upon, the empress, who ruled in her husband's name – was a good Confucian wife and looked after his needs by assisting him in his work. She was also a good mother and watched after the interest of her children – the people. The empress dowager, who ruled in the name of her son, was a good mother and taught him to govern. Simultaneously, she took care of the needs of her other children—the people. When the heir-apparent came of age, she still must meet her responsibilities as a good mother to her people.

Aside from the emperor's personal protection, palace women had legitimate civil service ranking and the privileges and respect due their positions. Many of these women held higher ranks than the men. The wives of emperors, for example, were superior to any minister. The consorts of the first rank held similar positions to those of the most important men in the bureaucracy. An example of the importance of ranks held by women can be seen in Emperor Jen-

tsung's decree that the highest ministers and their wives offer their obeisances to Chang-shih (2) in a special ceremony promoting her to Noble Consort. Men who protested were exiled.²¹

Therefore, palace women were seen as complying with the Confucian code of behavior by satisfying the requirements of obedient daughter, faithful wife and sacrificing mother. There was nothing in Chinese ideology that proscribed them from accruing power as long as they did not overstep what was allowed them in accordance with their ranks. Conflicts, if they should occur, were resolved by promotions. At times it meant demoting an empress and naming a more powerful woman to her position. The power of palace women was also supported by the emperor's protection, the men in the bureaucracy who needed their assistance and the families who utilized palace service as a means of attaining or maintaining power.

The Chinese viewed society as a delicately balanced organism, complex in its relationship, but working always toward stability. The existence of palace women, and their tendency to accrue and sometimes abuse power, was a fact of life that had to be vigilantly watched and contained. But, it was also a natural phenomenon of life that they had to live with. The Chinese lived with this reality throughout imperial history. The power of palace women waxed and waned at different periods depending on the rise and decline of power of different elements of Chinese society.

Appendix I

TITLES OF PALACE WOMEN

Mothers of Emperors

Supreme Empress Dowager

t'ai huang-t'ai-hou

The title originated in the Han. Since the Emperor's mother was titled 'huang t'ai-hou,' the emperor's paternal grandmother was given the title 't'ai-huang t'ai-hou.'¹

Empress Dowager

huang t'ai-hou

Historically, the title could be traced to [Ai-shih](#) (c.255 B.C.), mother of [Ch'in Chao-huang](#) (r.255-250 B.C.). [Ai-shih](#) was given the title 't'ai-hou' and from then on all mothers of emperors were addressed as such. When [Ch'in Shih-huang](#) took the title 'huang' for his imperial house to distinguish his authority from those of the feudal emperors, mothers of emperors were addressed as 'huang t'ai-hou.' The title was held by the living official consort of the previous emperor even if she was not the natural mother. The natural mother, if she was deceased, could be given the title posthumously. If the natural mother was living, she had to wait for the death of the official consort before the title could be hers.

In the Sung, during [Chen-tsung's](#) reign, the title was bestowed on [Yang-shih](#) after the death of Empress Dowager [Liu](#).

Although [Yang-shih](#) was not the natural mother nor the official consort, she had assisted in the upbringing of [Chen-tsung](#) and was like a mother to him.²

Supreme Consort

t'ai-fei

The title originated with the mother of [Chin Ai-ti](#) (r.362-366). [Chou-shih](#) (c.360), the natural mother of [Ai-ti](#), was not the official consort of the previous emperor and since the position of Empress Dowager was filled, [Ai-ti](#) created the title 't'ai-fei' for his natural mother. From that time on, natural mothers of emperors who were secondary consorts were addressed 't'ai-fei' if the position of Empress Dowager was held by the living official consort of the previous emperor. In the Wei (386-559), all the various kings' wives were titled 't'ai-fei.'

In the Sung, Empress Dowager Liu bestowed the title on Yang-shih, her confidante, who had assisted in the rearing of Chen-tsung.³

One of Supreme Department

t'ai-i, 1b.

This title was created by Chen-tsung in the Sung to honor Chu-shih, one of his father's wives. Throughout the Northern Sung, emperors followed suit, granting the title to wives of previous emperors only.⁴

One of Noble Department

kuei-i, 1b.

In 1033, Chen-tsung created the title to honor his father's wife, Tsang-shih. According to the *Sung-shih*, the title was graded 2a but the collection of edicts stated the title was graded 1b. Since Tsang-shih was holding the title One of Luminous Countenance, graded 2a, at the time the promotion was announced, the edict's grade must be the correct one as Tsang-shih was probably promoted from grade 2a to 1b.⁵

Princesses

Imperial Princess

kung-chu

According to the *Shih-chi* (Book of History), the Chou emperors did not have the authority to conduct (chu) the marriages of their own daughters but were obliged to do so through a feudal lord (kung) of the same surname. Hence all daughters of emperors were addressed 'kung-chu.'⁶

Senior Imperial Princess

chang kung-chu

The title originated with the founder of Han, (Han) Kao-tsu (r.206-194 B.C.). Since the daughters of the emperor were enfeoffed 'kung-chu,' Kao-tsu bestowed the title 'chang kung-chu' on his sisters. From then on, all sisters of sitting emperors were promoted from Imperial Princess to Senior Imperial Princess.⁷

Eminent Senior Imperial Princess

ta chang-kung-chu

The title originated with Han Wu-ti (r.140-86 B.C.). From that time on, all aunts of emperors were promoted from Senior Imperial Princess to Eminent Senior Imperial Princess.⁸

Deified Beauty

ti-i

In 1126, Hui-tsung changed all three different titles of Imperial Princesses into one. From then on, all Imperial Princesses, regardless of whether they were daughters, sisters, or aunts of the emperor, were addressed 'ti-i.'⁹

Wives of Emperors

Empress

huang-hou

Originally, the emperor's principal consort was addressed 'yüan-fei', then 'cheng-fei.' According to the Rites of Chou, the wife of the Son of Heaven was to be addressed 'hou.' The character 'hou' means to continue the body and was adopted by the imperial Chou house to indicate the responsibility of the women to bear heirs for the continuation of the imperial lineage. In the Ch'in, the emperors adopted the title 'huang' for themselves and titled their principal consorts 'huang-hou.' From that time on the tradition was followed and all principal consorts of emperors were addressed 'huang-hou.'¹⁰

In the Sung, when an empress was to be installed, the emperor personally went to a small palace by the eastern gate. There, he summoned the scholars of the Hanlin Academy and gave them his orders. The scholars would then be locked up in the palace to draft the proclamation.¹¹

The tradition of deposing empresses originated with Ching-ti (r.156-140 B.C.) when he deposed the Empress Dowager Po.¹²

In the Northern Sung, two empresses, Kuo-shih and Meng-shih, were deposed. In both cases, the women were imposed on the emperors by the regents. At the deaths of the regents, the women, who were innocent victims, became the targets for the projection of their husbands' resentment and desires for revenge.¹³

The four imperial consorts graded 1a

Noble Consort

kuei-fei

The title originated with Hsiao Wu-ti (r.454-465). He created the title in 455 and graded it equal to that of the grand secretary (hsiang-kuo). This was the most prestigious of the four consort titles.

Pure Consort

shu-fei

The title originated with [Wei Ming-ti \(r.227-240\)](#) who ranked it equal to the "san-ssu"(provincial secretary, provincial judge, salt-commissioner). It was the second-most-prestigious of the four consort titles.

Virtuous Consort

te-fei

The title was created by [Sui Yang-ti \(r.605-617\)](#) who ranked it third-most-prestigious within the imperial consort system.

Worthy Consort

hsien-fei

According to T'ang sources, this title was created by [Sui Yang-ti](#) but no confirmation of this could be found in [Sui records](#).
The title probably had its beginnings in the T'ang.

Minor wives¹⁵

One of Pure Deportment

shu-i, 1b.

The title allegedly began with [Chin Wu-ti \(r.265-290\)](#) who established it as one of the nine concubine (chiu-p'in) positions. The nine concubines held equal ranking with the nine ministers (chiu-yü).

T'ang sources referred to this title as one within the 'six department' category.

[Sung hui-yao](#) recorded that [Chen-tsung](#) revived this title and that it had been in use during the T'ang.

One of Pure Countenance

shu-jung, 1b.

According to the [Nan-shih](#), the title was created by [Wei Ming-ti \(r.227-240\)](#). The title was revived by [Chen-tsung](#) in the [Sung](#).

One of Obedient Deportment

shun-i, 1b.

The title supposedly began with [Sui Yang-ti](#) but fell into disuse during the T'ang. It was revived by [Chen-tsung](#) in the [Sung](#).

One of Obedient Countenance

shun-jung, 1b.

The title supposedly began with [Sui Yang-ti](#) and was revived in the [Sung](#) by [Chen-tsung](#).

One of Beautiful Deportment

yüan-i, 1b.

The title allegedly originated in the Northern Ch'i (560-577) and was revived by Chen-tsung in the Sung.

One of Beautiful Countenance

yüan-jung, 1b.

According to the *Sung hui-yao*, Chen-tsung created the title in 1013. The title was ranked superior to One of Luminous Deportment.

One of Luminous Deportment

chao-i, 2a

The title originated with Han Yüan-ti (r.48-32 B.C.).¹⁶ In the Northern Wei (386-532), there were the left and the right 'chao-i' and the titles were graded equal to the great *ssu-ma*, president of the board of war.

In the Northern Ch'i, the title was made equal to the great secretary (ch'en-hsiang). In the T'ang, the title was classified with the nine concubines.

One of Luminous Countenance

chao-jung, 2a.

The title originated in the Han. In the T'ang, it was classified as one of the nine concubine positions.

One of Luminous Beauty

chao-yüan, 2a.

T'ang records claim the title had originated in Sui but no supporting evidence of this claim could be found in Sui records. The title probably originated in the T'ang.

One of Cultivated Deportment

hsiu-i, 2a

The title originated with Wei Wen-ti (r.220-227). In the T'ang, it was classified as one of the nine concubine positions.

One of Cultivated Countenance

hsiu-jung, 2a.

The title originated with Wei Wen-ti (r.220-227) and was revived by Sui Yang-ti.

One of Cultivated Beauty

hsiu-yüan, 2a.

Although T'ang records claim this title had originated during the Sui, the *Pei-shih* records the title had originated in the Northern Ch'i, c.550.

One of Fulfilled Deportment

ts'ung-i, 2a.

Classified within the nine concubine positions. T'ang records claim the title had originated in 618 at the founding of the dynasty. The *Pei-shi*, on the other hand, credited Sui Yang-ti with having created the title.

One of Fulfilled Countenance

ts'ung-jung, 2a.

The title was first recorded in the Han. *Pei-shih* credits Sui Yang-ti with having revived it.

One of Fulfilled Beauty

ts'ung-yüan, 2a.

Although T'ang records claim the title was one inherited from the Sui, no mention of the title exists in Sui records.

Fair and Handsome One

chieh-yü, 3a.

According to the History of Wei, this title originated in the Han and was revived by Sui Yang-ti.¹⁷

Beautiful One

mei-jen, 4a.

The title originated in the Han with Kuang Wu-ti (r.24-58). It was infrequently used in the succeeding dynasties until its revival by Chen-tsung in the Sung.

Talented One

ts'ai-jen, 5a.

The title originated in the Han under Kuang Wu-ti (r.24-58).

Noble One

kuei-jen, 5a.

The title originated with Kuang Wu-ti (r.24-58) in the Han. It was used infrequently until its revival by Sung Chen-tsung.

Titles of Female Officials

Supreme Commander of the Palace

kung-ssu-ling, 4a.

The title was created by Chen-tsung in 1013 to especially honor Shao-shih for her many years of faithful service as chief-of-surveillance. From this time on the supreme commander was responsible for the entire administrative structure of the palace women's service organization.¹⁸

Chiefs-of-services

shang-kung, 5a.

Prior to 1013, the title was held by the highest officials in the palace administrative structure. The officials, in addition for their direct responsibility for the first bureau, The Bureau of General Affairs, had supreme command for all six bureaus. They were also responsible for the guiding of the empresses and acquisition and disposition of all necessities. After 1013, with the superimposition of the supreme commander over the entire administrative structure, the duties of the Chiefs-of-Services were restricted to the first bureau. They were responsible for the operation of all departments in the first bureau; for the palace seals, the incoming and outgoing of documents and mail, receipt and transmission of all orders affecting the women, female personnel registers, remuneration, as well as traffic to and from the inner palaces.¹⁹

Chiefs-of-rites-and-etiquette

shang-i, 5a

The title was held by two officials who headed the Bureau of Rites and Etiquette. They were responsible for all rites, etiquette, and daily living procedures within the inner palaces. They also had charge of all classical texts, teaching, acquisition of writing implements, desks, etc.²⁰

Chiefs-of-clothing

shang-fu, 5a.

The two officials who held this title were the chiefs of the Bureau of Clothing. They were responsible for clothing, vestments, ornaments, jewelry, soap, towels, combs, bathrobes, and adornments. They also had charge of guarding the palaces as well as for palace defense weapons.²¹

Chiefs-of-food and-wine

shang-shih, 5a.

The two officials who held this title were the Chiefs of the Bureau of Food and Wine. They supervised the preparation, serving, and tasting of imperial meals; were responsible for the cooking and ceremonial utensils and for wine and liquor. They also had charge of all medicinal matters. The office was instituted in the Ch'in.²²

Chiefs-of-apartments

shang-ch'in, 5a.

The two title-holders were the chiefs of the Bureau of Apartments. They were responsible for the interior arrangements of the inner palaces; for beds, screens, nets, pillows, blankets, mats, and for sweeping, mopping, etc. They also had charge of chariots, umbrellas, fans, palace gardens and parks; the cultivation of vegetables and flowers, etc.; of lanterns, lamps, kerosene, candles, etc.²³

Chiefs-of-work

shang-kung, 5a.

The two officials holding this title were the chiefs of the Bureau of Work. They were responsible for sewing and making of all clothing, and for seamstresses; had charge of fabrics and dyes; for gold, jade, and precious stones for decoration on clothing. They were also responsible for distributing clothing and miscellaneous items.²⁴

Chief-of-surveillance

kung-cheng, 5a.

The title-holder had charge over correct behavior within the palaces. Her duty was to correct errors, expose shortcomings and wrong-doings and to recommend punishment. The title supposedly originated in the Chou.²⁵

Directors graded 6a.

ssu-chi

The two title-holders headed the Department of Records within the Bureau of General Affairs. They were in charge of incoming and outgoing mail. They recorded, sorted, inspected, sealed, received and transmitted all notes, documents and imperial orders.²⁶

ssu-yen

The two title-holders headed the Department of the Transmission of Orders within the Bureau of General Affairs. These officials were in charge of promulgating official edicts affecting palace women.²⁷

ssu-pu

The two title-holders headed the Department of Personnel within the Bureau of General Affairs. They were in charge of the registers of female personnel, their pay, and other administrative duties.²⁸

ssu-wei

The six title-holders headed the Department of Gatekeeping within the Bureau of General Affairs. They were in charge of doors and keys as well as the in-and-out-flow of persons to the inner palaces.²⁹

ssu-chi

The two title-holders headed the Department of Education within the Bureau of Rites and Etiquette. They were in charge of teaching, classical texts, acquisition of writing implements, desks, etc.³⁰

ssu-yüeh

The four title-holders headed the Department of Music within the Bureau of Rites and Etiquette. They were in charge of music, musicians, manuscripts, and related affairs.³¹

ssu-pin

The two title-holders headed the Department of Guests within the Bureau of Rites and Etiquette. They were responsible for guests and visitors to palace women as well as audiences with imperial women.³²

ssu-tsan

The two title-holders headed the Department of Ceremony within the Bureau of Rites and Etiquette. The officials were responsible for rules of etiquette regarding palace women. They had charge of processional order, setting up of tablets of insignia, etc.³³

ssu-pao

The two title-holders headed the Department of Jewelry within the Bureau of Clothing. The officials were responsible for all paintings, jewelry, jade tallies of authority, etc.³⁴

ssu-i

The two title-holders headed the Department of Clothing within the Bureau of Clothing. They were responsible for all personnel garments and their trimmings.³⁵

ssu-shih

The two title-holders headed the Department of Adornments within the Bureau of Clothing. They were responsible for soap, towels, bathrobes, and personal adornments.³⁶

ssu-chang

The two title-holders headed the Department of Security within the Bureau of Clothing. The officials were responsible for guard duties and defense weapons.³⁷

ssu-shan

The two title-holders headed the Department of Utensils within the Bureau of Food and Wine. They were in charge of banquet and ceremonial plates, dishes, and utensils.³⁸

ssu-yün

The two title-holders headed the Department of Wines within the Bureau of Food and Wine. They had charge of wine and liquor within the palaces.³⁹

ssu-yao

The two title-holders headed the Department of Medicine within the Bureau of Food and Wine. The two officials were in charge of all medicinal affairs.⁴⁰

ssu-ch'ih

The two title-holders headed the Department of Cooking within the Bureau of Food and Wine. They were responsible for preparing, serving, and tasting imperial meals.⁴¹

ssu-she

The two title-holders headed the Department of Interior Arrangements within the Bureau of Apartments. They were responsible for beds, pillows, mats, blankets, nets, sweeping, mopping, etc.⁴²

ssu-yü

The two title-holders headed the Department of Chariots within the Bureau of Apartments. They had charge of chariots, fans, and umbrellas.⁴³

ssu-yüan

The two title-holders headed the Department of Parks within the Bureau of Apartments. They had charge of palace gardens and parks, as well as the cultivation of flowers, vegetables, and fruits.⁴⁴

ssu-teng

The two title-holders headed the Department of Lighting within the Bureau of Apartments. They had charge of lanterns, lamps, candles, kerosene, etc.⁴⁵

ssu-chih

The two title-holders headed the Department of Manufacture within the Bureau of Work. They were in charge of sewing and making clothing for palace women.⁴⁶

ssu-chen

The two title-holders headed the Department of Precious Trimmings within the Bureau of Work. They had charge of gold, jade, and precious stones used for decoration on women's garments.⁴⁷

ssu-ts'ai

The two title-holders headed the Department of Fabrics within the Bureau of Work. They had charge of brocades, dyes, silks, and hemp for making women's clothing.⁴⁸

ssu-chi

The two title holders headed the Department of Distribution within the Bureau of Work. They were in charge of distributing clothing and all miscellaneous items.⁴⁹

ssu-cheng

The two title-holders assisted the chief-of-surveillance in the maintenance of law and order.⁵⁰

***Intendents graded 7a* ⁵¹**

tien-chi

The two title-holders assisted the directors of the Department of Records within the Bureau of General Affairs. Their work consisted of the recording and sorting out of all notes, documents, and orders affecting palace women.

tien-yen

The two title-holders assisted the directors of the Department of the Transmission of Orders within the Bureau of General Affairs. Their work involved the promulgation of edicts affecting palace women.

tien-pu

The two title-holders assisted the directors of the Department of Personnel within the Bureau of General Affairs. They worked with personnel registers, pay, etc.

tien-wei

The two title-holders assisted the directors of the Department of Gatekeeping within the Bureau of General Affairs.

tien-chi

The two title-holders assisted the directors of the Department of Education within the Bureau of Rites and Etiquette.

tien-yüeh

The four title-holders assisted the directors of the Department of Music within the Bureau of Rites and Etiquette.

tien-pin

The two title-holders assisted the directors of the Department of Guests within the Bureau of Rites and Etiquette.

tien-tsan

The two title-holders assisted the directors of the Department of Ceremony within the Bureau of Rites and Etiquette.

tien-pao

The two title-holders assisted the directors of the Department of Jewelry within the Bureau of Clothing.

tien-i

The two title-holders assisted the directors of the Department of Clothing within the Bureau of Clothing.

tien-shih

The two title-holders assisted the directors of the Department of Adornments within the Bureau of Clothing.

tien-chang

The two title-holders assisted the directors of the Department of Security within the Bureau of Clothing.

tien-shan

The two title-holders assisted the directors of the Department of Utensils within the Bureau of Food and Wine.

tien-yün

The two title-holders assisted the directors of the Department of Wines within the Bureau of Food and Wine.

tien-yao

The two title-holders assisted the directors of the Department of Medicine within the Bureau of Food and Wine.

tien-ch'ih

The two title-holders assisted the directors of the Department of Cooking within the Bureau of Food and Wine.

tien-she

The two title-holders assisted the directors of the Department of Interior Arrangements within the Bureau of Apartments.

tien-yü

The two title-holders assisted the directors of the Department of Chariots within the Bureau of Apartments.

tien-yüan

The two title-holders assisted the directors of the Department of Parks within the Bureau of Apartments.

tien-teng

The two title-holders assisted the directors of the Department of Lighting within the Bureau of Apartments.

tien-chih

The two title-holders assisted the directors of the Department of Manufacture within the Bureau of Work.

tien-chen

The two title-holders assisted the directors of the Department of Precious Trimmings within the Bureau of Work.

tien-ts'ai

The two title-holders assisted the directors of the Department of Fabrics within the Bureau of Work.

tien-chi

The two title-holders assisted the directors of the Department of Distribution within the Bureau of Work.

tien-cheng

The four title-holders assisted the Chief-of-surveillance in the maintenance of law and order.

***Supervisors graded 8a* 52**

chang-chi

The two title-holders worked in the Department of Records within the Bureau of General Affairs.

chang-yen

The two title-holders worked in the Department of the Transmission of Orders within the Bureau of General Affairs.

chang-pu

The two title-holders worked in the Department of Personnel within the Bureau of General Affairs.

chang-wei

The six title-holders worked in the Department of Gatekeeping within the Bureau of General Affairs.

chang-chi

The two title-holders worked in the Department of Education within the Bureau of General Affairs.

chang-chi

The two title-holders worked in the Department of Music within the Bureau of Rites and Etiquette.

chang-pin

The two title-holders worked in the Department of Guests within the Bureau of Rites and Etiquette.

chang-tsan

The two title-holders worked in the Department of Ceremony within the Bureau of Rites and Etiquette.

chang-pao

The two title-holders worked in the Department of Jewelry within the Bureau of Clothing.

chang-i

The two title-holders worked in the Department of Clothing within the Bureau of Clothing.

chang-shih

The two title-holders worked in the Department of Adornments within the Bureau of Clothing.

chang-chang

The two title-holders worked in the Department of Security within the Bureau of Clothing.

chang-shan

The four title-holders worked in the Department of Utensils

within the Bureau of Food and Wine.

chang-yün

The two title-holders worked in the Department of Wines within the Bureau of Food and Wine.

chang-yao

The two title-holders worked in the Department of Medicine within the Bureau of Food and Wine.

chang-ch'ih

The two title-holders worked in the Department of Cooking within the Bureau of Food and Wine.

chang-she

The two title-holders worked in the Department of Interior Arrangements within the Bureau of Apartments.

chang-yü

The two title-holders worked in the Department of Chariots within the Bureau of Apartments.

chang-yüan

The two title-holders worked in the Department of Parks within the Bureau of Apartments.

chang-teng

The two title-holders worked in the Department of Lighting within the Bureau of Apartments.

chang-chih

The two title-holders worked in the Department of Manufacture within the Bureau of Work.

chang-chen

The two title-holders worked in the Department of Fabrics within the Bureau of Work.

chang-ts'ai

The two title-holders worked in the Department of Fabrics within the Bureau of Work.

chang-chi

The two title-holders worked in the Department of Distribution within the Bureau of Work.

nü-shih

Ninety-two title-holders worked as clerks, annalists, or secretaries within the different departments of the six bureaus. The post was first recorded in the *Rites of Chou*.

t'ung-shih, 7a

No functional description of this title was found in the historical sources.

Appendix II

METHODS OF ENTRY INTO PALACE SERVICE

Chart 10

	Marriage - Principal Consort	Marriage - Secondary Consort	Summons From the Palace	Recruitment (Unknown Family)	Unknown (Military Family)(?)
<i>T'ai-tsu's Wives</i>					
<i>Empresses</i>					
Ho-shih	x				
Wang-shih (1)	x				
Sung-shih (1)	x				

Chart 11

	Marriage - Principal Consort	Marriage - Secondary Consort	Summons From the Palace	Recruitment (Unknown Family)	Unknown (Military Family)(?)
<i>T'ai-tsung's Wives</i>					
<i>Empresses</i>					
Yin-shih	x				
Fu-shih	x				
Li Ming-te	x				
Li Yüan-te	x				
<i>Imperial Consorts</i>					
Sun-shih					x
Tsang-shih			x		
Fang-shih				x	
Chu-shih (1)				x	
Kao-shih (1)				x	
Shao-shih				x	
<i>Minor Wives</i>					
Li-shih (3)				x	
Wu-shih (1)				x	
Jen-shih				x	

Chart 12

	Marriage - Principal Consort	Marriage - Secondary Consort	Summons From the Palace	Recruitment (Unknown Family)	Unknown (Military Family)(?)
<i>Chen-tsung's Wives</i>					
<i>Empresses</i>					
P'an-shih	x				
Kuo-shih (1)	x				
Liu-shih (1)			x		
Li-shih (4)					x
Yang-shih (1)				x	
<i>Imperial Consorts</i>					
Tu-shih				x	
Shen-shih			x		
Ts'ao-shih (1)			x		
Ch'en-shih (1)				x	
<i>Minor Wives</i>					
Tai-shih					x
Hsü-shih				x	
Ch'en-shih (2)				x	

Chart 13

	Marriage - Principal Consort	Marriage - Secondary Consort	Summons From the Palace	Recruitment (Unknown Family)	Unknown (Military Family)(?)
<i>Jen-tsung's Wives</i>					
<i>Empresses</i>					
Kuo-shih (2)	x				
Chang-shih (1)					x
Ts'ao-shih (2)	x				
Chang-shih (2)			x		
<i>Imperial Consorts</i>					
Miao-shih				x	
Chou-shih				x	
Tung-shih				x	
Chang-shih (3)			x		
Yü-shih				x	
Yang-shih (2)			x		
Feng-shih (1)					x
Chang-shih (4)			x		
<i>Minor Wives</i>					
Chang-shih (5)			x		
Yang-shih (3)				x	
Shang-shih				x	
Chu-shih (2)				x	
Lien-shih				x	

Chart 14

	Marriage - Principal Consort	Marriage - Secondary Consort	Summons From the Palace	Recruitment (Unknown Family)	Unknown (Military Family)(?)
<i>Ying-tsung's Wives</i>					
<i>Empresses</i>					
Kao-shih (2)	x				
<i>Imperial Consorts</i>					
None					
<i>Minor Wives</i>					
Chang-shih (6)				x	
Pao-shih				x	
Chang-shih (7)				x	

Chart 15

	Marriage - Principal Consort	Marriage - Secondary Consort	Summons From the Palace	Recruitment (Unknown Family)	Unknown (Military Family)(?)
<i>Shen-tsung's Wives</i>					
<i>Empresses</i>					
Hsiang-shih	x				
Chu-shih (3)				x	
Ch'en-shih (3)				x	
<i>Imperial Consorts</i>					
Hsing-shih				x	
Wu-shih (2)				x	
Sung-shih (2)				x	
Lin-shih				x	
Chang-shih (8)				x	
Feng-shih (2)				x	
Yang-shih (4)				x	
<i>Minor Wives</i>					
Chu-shih (4)				x	
Ch'ien-shih				x	
Kuo-shih (3)				x	
Kou-shih				x	

Chart 16

	Marriage - Principal Consort	Marriage - Secondary Consort	Summons From the Palace	Recruitment (Unknown Family)	Unknown (Military Family)(?)
<i>Che-tsung's Wives</i>					
<i>Empresses</i>					
Meng-shih	x				
Liu-shih (2)				x	
<i>Imperial Consorts</i>					
None					
<i>Minor Wives</i>					
Chang-shih (9)				x	
Hu-shih				x	
Han-shih				x	
Mu-shih				x	
Wei-shih (1)				x	
Kao-shih (3)				x	
Liu-shih (3)				x	

Chart 17

	Marriage - Principal Consort	Marriage - Secondary Consort	Summons From the Palace	Recruitment (Unknown Family)	Unknown (Military Family)(?)
<i>Hui-tsung's Wives</i>					
<i>Empresses</i>					
Wang-shih (2)	x				
Cheng-shih					x
Wei-shih (2)			x		
Liu-shih (4)				x	
Liu-shih (5)			x		
<i>Imperial Consorts</i>					
Wang-shih (3)				x	
Ch'iao-shih (1)				x	
Wang-shih (4)				x	
Tsui-shih				x	
Yang-shih (5)				x	
Wang-shih (5)				x	
<i>Minor Wives</i>					
Han-shih (2)				x	
Hsia-shih				x	
Ch'en-shih (4)				x	
Chu-shih (5)				x	
Ch'iao-shih (2)				x	
Li-shih (5)				x	
Wang-shih (6)				x	
Liu-shih (6)				x	

Chart 18

	Marriage - Principal Consort	Marriage - Secondary Consort	Summons From the Palace	Recruitment (Unknown Family)	Unknown (Military Family)(?)
<i>Ch'in-tsung's Wives</i>					
<i>Empress</i>					
Chu-shih (6)	x				

Appendix III

CONDITIONS FOR

ADVANCEMENT OF PALACE

WOMEN

Chart 19

T'ai-tsu's Wives

	Family Background	Imperial Favor	Birth of Children	Longevity	Entering Nunnery	Meritorious Service	Patronage	Unknown
<i>Empresses</i>								
Ho-shih	x							
Wang-shih (1)	x							
Sung-shih (1)	x							

Chart 20

T'ai-tsung's Wives

	Family Background	Imperial Favor	Birth of Children	Longevity	Entering Nunnery	Meritorious Service	Patronage	Unknown
<i>Empresses</i>								
Yin-shih	x							
Fu-shih	x							
Li Ming-te	x							
Li Yüan-te			x					
<i>Imperial Consorts</i>								
Sun-shih	x							
Tsang-shih			x	x				
Fang-shih			x	x				
Chu-shih (1)					x			
Kao-shih (1)				x				
Shao-shih						x		
<i>Minor Wives</i>								
Li-shih (3)						x		
Wu-shih (1)	x							
Jen-shih			x					

Chart 21
Chen-tsung's Wives

	Family Background	Imperial Favor	Birth of Children	Longevity	Entering Nunnery	Meritorious Service	Patronage	Unknown
<i>Empresses</i>								
P'an-shih	x							
Kuo-shih (1)	x							
Liu-shih (1)		x						
Li-shih (4)			x					
Yang-shih (1)							x	
<i>Imperial Consorts</i>								
Tu-shih					x			
Shen-shih	x							
Ts'ao-shih (1)	x							
Ch'en-shih (1)						x		
<i>Minor Wives</i>								
Tai-shih	x							
Hsü-shih						x		
Ch'en-shih (2)								x

Chart 22
Jen-tsung's Wives

	Family Background	Imperial Favor	Birth of Children	Longevity	Entering Nunnery	Meritorious Service	Patronage	Unknown
<i>Empresses</i>								
Kuo-shih (2)	x							
Chang-shih (1)		x						
Ts'ao-shih (2)	x							
Chang-shih (2)		x						
<i>Imperial Consorts</i>								
Miao-shih		x		x				
Chou-shih		x		x				x
Tung-shih		x	x					
Chang-shih (3)								x
Yü-shih			x			x		
Feng-shih (1)				x				
Chang-shih (4)								x
Yang-shih (2)				x	x			
<i>Minor Wives</i>								
Chang-shih (5)			x					x
Yang-shih (3)				x				
Shang-shih		x						
Chu-shih (2)				x				
Lien-shih								x

Chart 23
Ying-tsung's Wives

	Family Background	Imperial Favor	Birth of Children	Longevity	Entering Nunnery	Meritorious Service	Patronage	Unknown
<i>Empresses</i>								
Kao-shih (2)	x	x	x	x				
<i>Imperial Consorts</i>								
None								
<i>Minor Wives</i>								
Chang-shih (6)				x				
Pao-shih				x				
Chang-shih (7)				x				

Chart 24
Shen-tsung's Wives

	Family Background	Imperial Favor	Birth of Children	Longevity	Entering Nunnery	Meritorious Service	Patronage	Unknown
<i>Empresses</i>								
Hsiang-shih	x			x				
Chu-shih			x	x				
Chen-shih			x					
<i>Imperial Consorts</i>								
Hsing-shih			x	x				
Wu-shih (2)			x	x				
Sung-shih (3)			x	x				
Lin-shih			x	x				
Chang-shih (8)			x	x				
Feng-shih (2)								x
Yang-shih (4)						x		
<i>Minor Wives</i>								
Chu-shih (4)								x
Ch'ien-shih					x			
Kuo-shih (3)			x					
Kou-shih				x				

Chart 25
Che-tsung's Wives

	Family Background	Imperial Favor	Birth of Children	Longevity	Entering Nunnery	Meritorious Service	Patronage	Unknown
<i>Empresses</i>								
Meng-shih	x			x				
Liu-shih (2)		x	x					
<i>Imperial Consorts</i>								
None								
<i>Minor Wives</i>								
Chang-shih (9)								
Hu-shih								x
Han-shih								x
Mu-shih								x
Wei-shih (1)								x
Kao-shih (3)								x
Liu-shih (3)								x

Chart 26

Hui-tsung's Wives

	Family Background	Imperial Favor	Birth of Children	Longevity	Entering Nunnery	Meritorious Service	Patronage	Unknown
<i>Empresses</i>								
Wang-shih (2)	x		x					
Cheng-shih		x	x					
Wei-shih (2)			x					
Liu-shih (4)		x	x					
Liu-shih (5)		x	x					
<i>Imperial Consorts</i>								
Wang-shih (2)		x	x					
Ch'iao-shih (1)		x	x					
Wang-shih (4)		x	x					
Tsui-shih		x	x					
Yang-shih (5)		x	x					
Wang-shih (5)		x	x					
<i>Minor Wives</i>								
Han-shih (2)								x
Hsia-shih								x
Ch'en-shih (4)								x
Chu-shih (5)								x
Ch'iao-shih (2)								x
Li-shih (5)								x
Wang-shih (6)								x
Liu-shih (6)								x

Chart 27

Ch'in-tsung's Wives

	Family Background	Imperial Favor	Birth of Children	Longevity	Entering Nunnery	Meritorious Service	Patronage	Unknown
<i>Empresses</i>								
Chu-shih (6)	x							

NOTES

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

¹ W. T. DeBary, "Chinese Despotism and the Confucian Ideal: A Seventeenth Century View," *Chinese Thought and Institutions* (Chicago, 1967), 163-203. Yü-ch'uan Wang, "Central Government of the Former Han," *Studies of Governmental Institutions* (Cambridge, 1968), 1-55.

² Hesung Chun Koh of the Human Relations Area Files has been doing some pioneer work on Korean palace women in the Yi dynasty.

³ James T. C. Liu and Peter J. Golas, *Change in Sung China* (Lexington, 1969).

⁴ Robert M. Hartwell, "A Cycle of Economic Change in Imperial China: Coal and Iron in Northeast China, 750-1350," *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient*, X, 1 (1967), 103-159. Hartwell, "The Evolution of the Early Northern Sung Monetary System, A.D. 960-1025," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 87, 3 (1967), 280-289. Hartwell, "Financial Expertise, Examinations, and the Formulation of Economic Policy in Northern Sung China," *Journal of Asian Studies*, XXX, 2 (1971), 281-314. Shiba Yoshinobu, *Commerce and Society in Sung China* (Ann Arbor, 1970).

⁵ Wolfram Eberhard, *A History of China* (Berkeley, 1950), 208-223.

⁶ Chiu Ying-wing, *Brief History of the Chao* (Hong Kong, 1965), 1-4.

⁷ Ibid., 5-6. Dun J. Li, *The Ageless Chinese* (New York, 1971), 191-216.

⁸ Regional commandants ([chieh-tu shih](#)) were senior frontier commanders—origin of the title can be found in E. G. Pulleyblank's *The Background of the Rebellion of An Lu-shan* (London, 1955).

⁹ C. P. Fitzgerald, *China: A Short Cultural History* (New York, 1969), 383-384. "[Ho-hou ma-tien](#)," (Empress Ho accuses the Court) in *Ching-hsi k'ao* (Collection of Peking Operas). Ho had died before T'ai-

tsung became emperor but the opera had her accusing him of having caused his brother's death, murdering his nephew, and usurping the throne. Y. W. Chiu, *Brief History of the Chao* pp. 32, 39

¹⁰ HSSCKY, 3/1a.

¹¹ HSSCKY, 4/1a.

¹² HSSCKY, 7/1a.

¹³ C. P. Fitzgerald, *China: A Cultural History*, 395-407.

¹⁴ TTSL, 9/1a.

¹⁵ HSSCKY, 15/1a.

¹⁶ C. P. Fitzgerald, *China: A Cultural History*, 395-407

¹⁷ Liu Po-chi, "Sung-tai to hsien-hou," (the many virtuous empresses of the Sung), STCCS, 181-192.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

¹ Ssu-ma Ch'ien, *Shih-chi*.

² Herbert A. Giles, *A Chinese Biographical Dictionary* (Taipei, 1971), 338. SWCY, 1/17, 18. KCSWK, 1/16.

³ Cheng Hsuan, *Chou-li*, 1/8a.

⁴ Lien-sheng Yang, "Female Rulers in Imperial China," *Studies of Governmental Institutions*, 153-170.

⁵ Giles, *A Chinese Biographical Dictionary*, 601, 232-233.

⁶ Ibid., 882-883. C. P. Fitzgerald, *Empress Wu* (Canberra, 1955).

⁷ Giles, *A Chinese Biographical Dictionary*, 553-554.

⁸ Ibid., 232-233.

⁹ Barber defines the dimensions of prestige as power, income, and education. (Bernard Barber, "Introduction to Social Stratification,"

Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, XV, 288). Shils terms the concept of social prestige, deferment-entitlement, and defines its properties as power, occupational role, wealth, style of life, kinship connections, and the like. (Edward A. Shils, "Deference," *Social Stratification*, 420-448).

¹⁰ CCTI, 29/1b-5a.

¹¹ See Appendix I.

¹² CCTI, 29/1b-5a, 6b-9b.

¹³ YHPPI, 1/26a, b; 38a-41a. HTKTT, 1/10b-11a.

¹⁴ Wages supposedly rose from 1,020 kuan in the T'ang to 200,000 kuan in the Sung. (CCTI, 29/1b-5a).

¹⁵ CSPC, 2/40-41.

¹⁶ SHY, 20, 478/2a-29b.

¹⁷ The Department of Records was headed by two directors (ssu-chi) assisted by two intendants (tien-chi), two supervisors (chang-chi), and six clerks (nü-shih).

¹⁸ For example, an edict was issued forbidding the mother of a minor wife to enter the palace (STCLC, 254). The Department of Transmission of Orders was headed by two directors (ssu-yen) assisted by two intendants (tien-yen), two supervisors (chang-yen), and six clerks.

¹⁹ KCTSCC, 2/12. The Department of Personnel was headed by two directors (ssu-pu) assisted by two intendants (tien-pu), two supervisors (chang-pu), and six clerks.

²⁰ The Department of Gatekeeping was headed by six directors (ssu-wei) assisted by six intendants (tien-wei), six supervisors (chang-wei), and four clerks.

²¹ YHPPI, 1/24b, 25b-27a. In the Ch'ing, palace women were taught reading and writing and numbers daily (CPLC, 12/3). The Department of Education was headed by two directors (ssu-chi) assisted by two intendants (tien-chi), two supervisors (chang-chi), and six clerks.

²² The Department of Music was headed by four directors (ssu-yüeh) assisted by four intendants (tien-yueh), two supervisors (chang-chi), and two clerks.

²³ The Department of Guests was headed by two directors (ssu-pin) assisted by two intendants (tien-pin), two supervisors (chang-pin), and two clerks.

²⁴ KKP, 4/25a. The Department of Ceremonies, was headed by two directors (ssu-tsan) assisted by two intendants (tien-tsan), two supervisors (chang-tsan), two clerks, and two recorders (t'ung-shih).

²⁵ The Department of Jewelry was headed by two directors (ssu-pao) assisted by two intendants (tien-pao), two supervisors (chang-pao), and four clerks.

²⁶ The Department of Clothing was headed by two directors (ssu-i) assisted by two intendants (tien-i), two supervisors (chang-i), and four clerks.

²⁷ The Department of Adornments was headed by two directors (ssu-shih), assisted by two intendants (tien-shih), two supervisors (chang-shih), and two clerks.

²⁸ The Department of Security was headed by two directors (ssu-chang) assisted by two intendants (tien-chang), two supervisors (chang-chang), and two clerks.

²⁹ The Department of Utensils was headed by two directors (ssu-shan) assisted by four intendants (tien-shan), four supervisors (chang-shan), and four clerks.

³⁰ The Department of Wines was headed by two directors (ssu-yün) assisted by two intendants (tien-yün), two supervisors (chang-yün), and two clerks.

³¹ The Department of Medicine was headed by two directors (ssu-yao) assisted by two intendants (tien-yao), two supervisors (chang-yao), and four clerks.

³² The two women were Ts'ao-shih, Beautiful One, and Yang-shih, Noble Consort. Yang offered to let Ts'ao feast the emperor first. When he was just beginning to enjoy himself, Yang came to claim her

turn. He spent the night at her palace and when he was sufficiently happy and drunk, she had him write the edict proclaiming her empress. Priscilla Ching Chung and H. Chiba, "Biography of Ning-tsung Yang-hou," in *Sung Biographies*, ed. by Herbert Franke (Wiesbaden, 1976), pp. 1222-1226. The Department of Cooking was headed by two directors (ssu-chih) assisted by two intendants (tien-chih), two supervisors (chang-chih), and four clerks.

33 The Department of Interior Arrangements was headed by two directors (ssu-she) assisted by two intendants (tien-she), two supervisors ([chang-she](#)), and four clerks.

34 The Department of Chariots was headed by two directors (ssu-yü) assisted by two intendants (tien-yü), two supervisors (chang-yü), and two clerks.

35 The Department of Parks was headed by two directors (ssu-yüan) assisted by two intendants (tien-yüan), two supervisors (chang-yüan), and two clerks.

36 The Department of Lighting was headed by two directors (ssu-teng) assisted by two intendants (tien-teng), two-supervisors (chang-teng), and two clerks.

37 The Department of Manufacture was headed by two directors (ssu-chih) assisted by two intendants (tien-chih), two supervisors ([chang-chih](#)), and four clerks.

38 The Department of Precious Trimmings was headed by two directors (ssu-chen) assisted by two intendants (tien-chen), two supervisors ([chang-chen](#)), and six clerks.

39 The Department of Fabrics was headed by two directors (ssu-ts'ai) assisted by two intendants (tien-ts'ai), two supervisors (chang-ts'ai), and four clerks.

40 The Department of Distribution was headed by two directors (ssu-chi) assisted by two intendants (tien-chi), two supervisors ([chang-chi](#)), and four clerks.

41 The Office of Surveillance was headed by the Chief-of-surveillance (shang-cheng) assisted by two directors (ssu-cheng), two intendants (tien-cheng), and four clerks.

⁴² *Chou-li*, 1/Ba, 8/2a. KCTSCC, 2/245/6a.

⁴³ T. Mitamura, *Chinese Eunuchs*, Japan, 1960), 75. SWCY, 1117-18. KCSWK, 1/16.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 75. Marcel Granet, *La polygynie sororale et le sororal dans la chine feodale* (Paris, 1920). Granet states that noblemen in feudal times married nine women at a time. His evidence is based on data from the *Tso-chuan*. For further information on Chinese numerology see Joseph Needham's *Science and Civilization in China* (London, 1970), III, 54-55.

⁴⁶ The empress-consort (*hou-fei*) system from Wei to Sui was: Empress, Noble Consort, Pure Consort, and Worthy Consort. From Sui on, with the creation of an extra position, the title of Worthy Consort was added.

⁴⁷ SS, 163/4b.

⁴⁸ Wang Chi-en (c.990) and other eunuchs plotted with Empress Li Ming-te to set aside the heir-apparent, Chen-tsung. Wang, a eunuch general who had successfully crushed an uprising in Szechuan, was anxious to seize power since T'ai-tsung had refused to admit eunuchs, despite their contributions, to central government. This conspiracy was discovered and thwarted by Lü Tuan (c.995), who kept Wang locked in a library while he personally invested Chen-tsung as emperor. Chen-tsung rewarded Lü making him his Chief Councilor. The power of the eunuchs was finally repressed in 1010 and their leaders were put to death. (Giles, *A Chinese Biographical Dictionary*, 65, 561-562. Mitamura, *Chinese Eunuchs*, 119-120).

⁴⁹ Lei Yün-kung (c.1012) successfully plotted with Empress Liu and Ting Wei (969-1040) to usurp the powers of the ailing Chen-tsung. At Chen-tsung's death, they caused K'ou Chün (d.1023)—who had supported the heir-apparent against them—to be exiled in 1022. (Giles, *A Chinese Biographical Dictionary*, 61, 65).

⁵⁰ The eunuchs sowed dissension between Emperor Ying-tsung and his regent, Empress Dowager Ts'ao. Han Ch'i (1008-1075), the censor, succeeded in banishing all intriguing eunuchs in 1064. (Giles, *A Chinese Biographical Dictionary*, 561-562).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

¹ HTKTT, 1/10b. CCTI, 29/1b-5a.

² See Appendix II.

³ CCTI, 1a-8a.

⁴ Fitzgerald, *China: A Cultural History*, 382. This pledge has been credited, by historians, as a masterstroke that allowed T'ai-tsu to bloodlessly disperse the armies that brought him to power.

⁵ The names of the founding generals are: Shih Shou-hsin, Wang Shen-i, Mu-jung Yen-chao, Han Ling-k'un, Kao Huai-te, Chang Ling-to, Chang Kuang-han, Chao Shou-hui, Wang Yen-sheng, Lo Yen-huai, Wang Chüan-pin, Ts'ao P'in, and P'an Mei. (Chiu, *Brief History of the Chao*, 38.) T'ai-tsu married his sister to Kao Huai-te (SS, 250/7b); his brother, K'uang-mei, married the daughter of Chang Khuang-han (SS, 244/2b); one of his own daughters was married to Shih Pao-chi, son of Shih Shou-hsin (SS, 248/1b); another daughter married Wang Ch'eng-yen, son of Wang Shen-i. (SS, 248/1b)-the grandson of this union, Wang Shih-yüeh, eventually married the daughter of Ying-tsung; Ts'ao P'in's daughter married Chen-tsung while his son married a granddaughter of T'ai-tsu, daughter of Chao Te-fang (SS, 258/7b), P'in's granddaughter was the second principal consort to Jen-tsung, his great-granddaughter, Kao-shih, principal consort to Ying-tsung. (HSSCKY, 7/1b).

⁶ SS, 242/2b. TTSL, 13/2b.

⁷ Hsueh Chü-cheng, *Chiu wu-tai shih*, 115/9a-10a. SS, 242/2b. TTSL, 13/2b.

⁸ SS, 242/3a. TTSL, 31/6b-7a. Sung Yao (c.920) and Sung Wu (c. 936).

⁹ SS, 242/3a. TTSL, 31/6b-7a. Sung Yao (c.920) and Sung Wu (c. 936).

¹⁰ Wang Gung-wu, *Structure of Power in Northern China during the Five Dynasties Period*, 134-135, 199-200. Fu Ts'un-shen is also known as Li Ts'un-shen (c.923), grandfather; SS, 251/4a, 7a. LPG, 16/6b-8a. Fu Yen-ch'ing (d.974), father.

¹¹ 11 SS, 258/10a, 242/2a. TTSL, 13/3b. Giles, *A Chinese Biographical Dictionary*, 614-615.

¹² SS, 247/4a-b, 259/1b. TTSL, 21/7b-8a. LPG, 11/14a-b.

¹³ SS, 242/4a, b.

¹⁴ Loc. cit., Ibid., 258/1a-8a.

¹⁵ SS, 242/10a-12a.

¹⁶ Ibid., 243/1b-2a.

¹⁷ SS., 243/2b-6a.

¹⁸ Ibid., 264/2b-4a. Giles, *A Chinese Biographical Dictionary*, 645-646.

¹⁹ HSSCKY, 19/1a-b.

²⁰ Empress Li Yüan-te. SS, 242/3b. TTSL, 13/3b-4a. HSSCKY, 2/1b.

²¹ SS, 242/3b, 257/7b-9a, 13a. Ming-ch'en-pei, III/5/1a.

²² HSSCKY, 2/2a, 8/1b.

²³ Ibid., 2/2b-4a. SS, 264/2b-4a.

²⁴ Chang kuei-fei. SS, 242/9b-10a. SJIS, 34-36.

²⁵ HSSCKY, 4/2a.

²⁶ HSSCKY, 8/1b-3a.

²⁷ Priscilla Ching-Chung and H. Chiba, "Biography of Wei-fei," *Sung Biographies* (Wiesbaden, 1976) 1178-1180.

²⁸ SJIS, 10-11.

²⁹ Priscilla Ching-Chung and H.Chiba, "Biography of Yang-hou," *Sung Biographies* (Wiesbaden, 1976), 1222-1226.

³⁰ Chu-shih (3) (1051-1102). HSSCKY, 8/1b-3a.

³¹ YHPPI, 1/24b, 25b-27a. CPLC, 12/3.

³² CCTI, 27/2a-3b, 29/7b-8a.

³³ HTKTT, 5/2a-4b. YHPPI, 1/24b, 25b-27a.

³⁴ CPLC, 12/3.

³⁵ Ibid., 17/11.

³⁶ Li-shih (4), mother of Jen-tsung (SS, 242/6b-7a); Chang-shih (1) (HSSCKY, 4/1b); Cheng-shih (SS, 243/6a, b); Sun-shih (HSSCKY, 2/2a); and Feng-shih (1) (HSSCKY, 4/2a).

³⁷ Another case of the daughter of an impoverished scholarly family recruited into the palace is in the Southern Sung. See Priscilla Ching-Chung and H. Chiba, "Hsieh Huang-hou," *Sung Biographies*, 410-412.

³⁸ CTKCTSCC 1117.

³⁹ CTKCTSCC, 1117.

⁴⁰ CPLC, 17/1, 12/3.

⁴¹ Derived from previous Table.

⁴² CCTI, 29/5a, b, 8a, b.

⁴³ Ibid., 29/9a, b.

⁴⁴ SS, 243/8b-9a.

⁴⁵ HSSCKY, 4/2a.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

¹ CCTI, 34/2b-4a. (Anxiety was especially expressed over the appointment of imperial relatives to military offices.)

² "Wai-ch'ih" in Ko Wei-ch'i's *Sung-shih hsin-pien* (hereafter cited

as SSHP), 182/1. The writer notes that the ministers related to palace women were proud because of imperial favor and behaved in an unrestrained manner. These imperial relatives then caused chaos in government because of their pride and lack of restraint.

³ CCTI, 34/2a, b, 35/15b-16b, 34/11a, b.

⁴ Ibid., 29/9b-13a, 15b-16a, 13a-15a, 15a, b, 16b-17a.

⁵ SHY, 10, 811/1a-7a. Mitamura, *Chinese Eunuchs*, 116, 515. Giles, *A Chinese Biographical Dictionary*, 373, 859-60. Nurse Wang Sheng (c. 120), who served Emperor An (98-125) of the Latter Han, and K'o-shih (d.1627), who nursed Emperor Hsi-tsung (1605-1627) of the Ming, are typical examples. Wang Sheng was able to effect the removal of the current heir apparent by poisoning the latter's wet nurse, thus removing his protector in the palace; while K'o-shih, the lover of the eunuch Wei Chung-hsien (d.1627), reportedly plotted to overthrow the dynasty by causing the empress to have a miscarriage in order to clear the way for Wei to usurp the throne. The plot was not successful and she and her lover were both executed.

⁶ SS, 290/5b. The name of the retainer was Chang Ch'i (c.1020). This man was later richly rewarded and he and his family held important positions for three generations.

⁷ SS, 444/8b.

⁸ Li Ming-wan, *Su-chu fu-chih*, 113/5a, b; 109/9b, 59/10b, 77/11a, b.

⁹ For the grading of male officials, see E. A. Kracke, Jr. 's *Translation of Civil Service Titles* (Paris, 1957).

¹⁰ CCTI, 29/5b-6b. >

¹¹ HTKTT, 1/10b. CPLC, 12/3. STCLC, 12/3.

¹² Chu Tan, *Pan Chao* (Ch'ung-ch'ing, 1945), 63, 69. Howard Levy, *The Illusory Flame* (Tokyo, 1962), 63, 69. This is also evidenced by the many women portrayed in Chinese literature in books such as *Romance of the Western Chamber*, *The Courtesan's Jewel Box*, and *Ladies of the T'ang*.

¹³ According to promotional edicts in *Sung ta-chao-ling chi*. (a

collection of imperial edicts in the Sung).

¹⁴ See Appendix III.

¹⁵ Empress status—empress or empress dowager regardless of whether the title was bestowed while living or posthumously.

¹⁶ Imperial consort status—bestowed while living or posthumously.

¹⁷ Minor wife status – enfeoffed while living or posthumously.

¹⁸ The first woman was [Sun-shih \(d.983\)](#). [HSSCKY, 2/1b, 2a. SS, 264-2b-4a. TTSL, 31/4b-5a.](#)

¹⁹ The two women were [Wu-shih \(2\) \(d.1007\)](#) and [Tai-shih \(d.1033\)](#). [Wu-shih was the daughter of a minor military official while Tai-shih was the daughter of a regional commanadant. HSSCKY, 3/2a. SS, 279/5a.](#)

²⁰ [SS, 242/4b-6b. TTSL, 13/4b-6a. SJIS, 1/18-19.](#)

²¹ [SS, 243/6a.](#)

²² [Ibid., 243/6b- 7a.](#)

²³ The same incident about saving the emperor's life was recorded verbatim in the biography of Empress Ts'ao. The credit in that account was attributed to the empress and not to Chang-shih (2).

²⁴ [HSSCKY, 15/1b. SS, 243/9a.](#)

²⁵ [SS, 243/8b-9a.](#)

²⁶ [HSSCKY, 4/2a.](#)

²⁷ [Ibid., 2/2a.](#)

²⁸ [Ibid., 3/2a.](#)

²⁹ [Ibid., 4/2a.](#)

³⁰ [Ibid., 8/2a.](#)

³¹ Ibid., 2/1b.

³² Ibid., 3/1b.

³³ Ibid., 9/1b.

³⁴ Loc. cit.

³⁵ HSSCKY, 5/2a, 8/2a.

³⁶ STCLC, 118. HSSCKY, 4/2a, b, 8/1b-3a.

³⁷ SJIS, I/103.

³⁸ HSSCKY, 4/1b-2a.

³⁹ Ibid., 15/2a, b.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 2/1b-2a, 4/1b-2a.

⁴¹ Ibid., 8/2a.

⁴² Ibid., 2/1b-2a.

⁴³ Ibid., 8/1b-2a. SS, 242/9b.

⁴⁴ HSSCKY, 4/2a, b, 7/2a. The women were Yang-shih (3) (d.1105) and Chu-shih (2) (c.1085), wives of J'en-tsung; Chang-shih (6) (d.1111), Pao-shih (d.1102) and Chang-shih (7) (c.1100), wives of Ying-tsung.

⁴⁵ HSSCKY, 2/2a.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 3/2a, 8/2a.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 2/2a, 3/2a.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 3/1b-2a. SS, 242/7a, b. SJIS, I/19. TTSL, 13/6a, b. SSHP, 59/2a.

⁴⁹ HSSCKY, 4/2a.

⁵⁰ Giles, *A Chinese Biographical Dictionary*, 55, 404, 553. CCTI, 28/1a-6b. The banished officials were, [Fan Chung-yen \(989-1052\)](#) and

⁵¹ CCT. 28/7a-9b. TTSL, 13/6b-7a, 14/3b-4a. SJIS, I/30-31.

⁵² CCTI, 29/1a-8b, 34/1a-16b.

⁵³ Ibid., 29/1a-8b. HTCTCCP, 4/18b.

⁵⁴ SSHP, 182/2a.

⁵⁵ Loc. cit.

⁵⁶ CCTI, 35/3a-4b, 6a-14b.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 34/1a, b, 15a, b. SSHP, 182/2-3.

⁵⁸ SS, 463/?b-10a. SSHP, 182/2a, b, 89/77a.

⁵⁹ CCTI, 34/1a, b. SSHP, 182/2a, b.

⁶⁰ CCTI, 34/3b-4a, 12a. SSHP, 182/2b, 183/4b.

⁶¹ CCTI, 29/5a-6b.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

¹ Lien-sheng Yang, "Female Rulers in Imperial China," 47-61.

² TTSL, 59/1a-6b.

³ CCTI, 26/13b-14b.

⁴ James T. C. Liu, "An Administrative Cycle in Chinese History," *China* (Tucson, 1972), 75-90.

⁵ SSHP, 84/61a. SSCSPM, 23/141-252.

⁶ SSCSPM, 23/141-252.

⁷ SSHP, 59/2b-3a.

⁸ TTSL, 42/1a-3b.

⁹ SSHP, 59/2a, b, 3b, 82/55b-56a, 124/2b. SSCSPM, 34/238-244.

¹⁰ SSHP, 59/3a-4a, 82/55b-58a, 183/4a, b. SSCSPM, 347. STJWYFC, 86-87.

¹¹ SJIS, 2/45. SSHP, 59/3a-4a, 188/3b. SSCSPM, 47/367-372. STJWYFC, 190.

¹² CCTI, 34/14a-15a.

¹³ HTCTCCPCSPM, 34/10b. HTCTCCP, 165/9a-17b. SPHCNKMPY, 613.

¹⁴ CTKCTSCC, 2/12.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

¹ Arthur Waley, (translation) *The Book of Songs* (London, 1938), pp. 283-4.

² Adapted from the *I-Ching*, "Great Treatise," Ch. 1. "Heaven is high, earth is low thus the creative (ch'ien) and the receptive (k'un) are determined in correspondence with this difference between low and high, inferior and superior places are established." The words "male" and "female" did not appear but were symbolized by "ch'ien" and "k'un." Cary F. Baynes (trans.) *I-Ching* (Princeton, 1950), p. 280.

³ Book of Mencius, *The Four Books* translated by J. Legge (Hong Kong, 1959), p. 177.

⁴ J. Legge (trans.) "Book of Rites," *Sacred Books of the East* (Oxford, 1882), v. 27, p. 441.

⁵ Chu Tan, *Pan Chao* (Ch'ung-ch'ing, 1945). Robert Van Gulick, *Sexual Life in Ancient China* (Leiden, 1961), pp. 98-103.

⁶ Liu, Wu-chi, *An Introduction to Chinese Literature*, (New York, 1967), p. 147.

⁷ Wing-tsit Chan (trans.), "Reflections on Things at Hand," *The Neo-Confucian Anthology compiled by Chu Hsi and Lu Tsu-ch'ien*, (New York, 1967), p. 272.

⁸ Chü, Tung-tsu, *Law and Society in Traditional China* > (Paris, 1965).

⁹ Herlee_Creel, *The Birth of China*, (New York, 1964), p. 284.

¹⁰ Marcel Granet, *Chinese Civilization*, (London, 1957), p. 201,

¹¹ Van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China*, pp. 5-8. Alicia Ishihara and Howard Levy (trans.) *The Tao of Sex*, (Yokohama, 1967).

¹² The position of Women in Buddhism is quite complex since The Lotus Sutra also states that women have to be reborn as men before attaining Buddhahood.

¹³ "The Courtesan's Jewel Box," in *The Courtesan's Jewel Box*, trans. by Yang Hsien-i, pp. 246-271.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 272-321.

¹⁵ "The Story of Ts'ui Ying Ying," in *Romance of the Western Chamber*, trans. by S. I. Hsiung, (New York, 1968) pp. 271-281.

¹⁶ James R. Ware (trans.) *The Sayings of Confucius*, (New York, 1955), vol. 17, p. 23.

¹⁷ Quoted in Van Gulik's *Sexual Life in Ancient China*, pp. 103-104.

¹⁸ Richard F. S. Yang (trans.) *Eight Colloquial Tales of the Sung*, (Taipei,, 1972).

¹⁹ Richard F. S. Yang (trans.) *Eight Colloquial Tales of the Sung*, (Taipei,, 1972). Peggy R. Sanday, "Toward a theory on The Status of Women," *American Anthropologist*, vol. 75, # 5, October, 1973; "Female Status in the Public Domain," *Women, Culture and Society* (Stanford, 1974).

²⁰ Albert O'Hara, *The Position of Women in Early China* (Hong Kong, 1955), p. 261.

²¹ SHY; 2, 265/3/lb, 2a.

NOTES TO APPENDIX I

¹ KCSWK, 1/16.

² SWCY, 1116, HSSCKY, 3/2a, KCSWK, 1/16.

³ KCSWK, 1/17; SWCY, 1/17, HSSCKY, 3/2a.

⁴ HSSCKY, 3/2a.

⁵ STCLC, p. 104.

⁶ SWCY, 1118; KCSWK, 1117.

⁷ SWCY, 1/18.

⁸ Ibid., 1/18-19.

⁹ *Neng-kai ch'ai man-lu*, 12/313.

¹⁰ KCSWK, 1/15; SWCY, 1/15.

¹¹ *T'ieh-wei-shan ts'ung-t'an*, vol. 1, 1/21a.

¹² KCSWK, 1/16; SWCY, 1/16.

¹³ HSSCKY, 4/lb, 11/1a.

¹⁴ SWCY, 1/17-18.

¹⁵ Ibid., 1/19-22.

¹⁶ *T'ung-tien*, 34/13a.

¹⁷ Loc. cit.

¹⁸ SHY, 20478/1b.

¹⁹ Ibid., 20478/2a, b; M, 4-7493-31.

²⁰ SHY, 20478/2b.

²¹ Loc. cit; M., 4-7493-141.

²² SHY, 20478/3a; M, 4-7493-100.

- ²³ SHY, 20478/3a.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 20478/3b; M, 4-7493-49.
- ²⁵ SHY, 20478/3b; M, 3-7156-151.
- ²⁶ SHY, 20478/2a.
- ²⁷ Loc. cit.
- ²⁸ Loc. Cit. M, 2-3257-397.
- ²⁹ SHY, 20478/2a.
- ³⁰ SHY, 20478/2b; M, 2-3257-148.
- ³¹ SHY, 20478/2b.
- ³² Loc. cit. M, 2-3257-383.
- ³³ SHY, 20478/2b; M, 2-3256-106.
- ³⁴ SHY, 20478/2b.
- ³⁵ Ibid., 20478/2a.
- ³⁶ Ibid., 20478/2b.
- ³⁷ Loc. cit.
- ³⁸ Ibid., 20478/3a.
- ³⁹ Loc. cit., M, 2-3257-8.
- ⁴⁰ SHY, 20478/3a; M, 2-3257-417.
- ⁴¹ SHY, 20478/3a; M, 2-3257-153.
- ⁴² SHY, 20478/3a.
- ⁴³ Loc. cit., M, 2-3257-417.
- ⁴⁴ SHY, 20478/3a.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 20478/3a, b.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 20478/3b.

⁴⁷ Loc. cit., M, 2-3257-177.

⁴⁸ SHY, 20478/3b.

⁴⁹ Loc. cit.

⁵⁰ Loc. cit.

⁵¹ SHY, 20478/2a-3b.

⁵² Loc. cit.

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GLOSSARY

To view occurrences of a glossary entry in the text, use the links (represented by letters a, b, c, ...) following the Chinese form of the entry. Use the Back button to return to the Glossary. The Pinyin version of each entry is shown in parentheses after the Wade-Giles version.

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An (An)

安 [a](#)

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張耆 [a](#), [b](#)

Chang Ching-tsung (Zhang Jing-zong)

張警粽 [a](#)

Chang Hua-chi (Zhang Hua-ji)

彰化基 [a](#)

Chang Kuang-han (Zhang Guang-han)

張光翰 [a](#)

Chang kuei-fei (Zhang gui-fei)

張貴妃 [a](#)

chang kung-chu (zhang gong-zhu)

長公主 [a](#)

Chang Ling-to (Zhang Ling-duo)

張令鐸 [a](#)

Chang Pang-ch'ang (Zhang Bang-chang)

張邦昌 [a](#)

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章惇 [a](#), [b](#), [c](#), [d](#)

Chang Yao-tso (Zhang Yao-zuo)

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趙普 a

Chao Shih-yin (Zhao Shi-yin)

趙弛殷 a

Chao Shou-hui (Zhao Shou-hui)

趙壽徽 a

Chao Te-fang (Zhao De-fang)

趙德芳 a

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趙隱 a

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Che-tsung (Zhe-zong)

哲宗 a, b, c

Chen-tsung (Zhen-zong)

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ch'en-hsiang (chen-xiang)

臣相 a

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Fu Wei-chung (Fu Wei-zhong)
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Han Yüan-ti (Han Yuan-di)
漢元帝 a
Han-shih (Han-shi)
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Hang-chou (Hang-zhou)
杭州 a
Ho-hou (He-hou)
賀后 a
Ho-shih (He-shi)
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hou-fei (hou-fei)
后妃 a
Hsi-tsung (Xi-zong)
熹宗 a
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Hsiang Min-chung (Xiang Min-zhong)

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Hsiang Tsung-huai (Xiang Zong-huai)
向宗回 a
Hsiang Tsung-liang (Xiang Zong-liang)
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Li Chang-i (Li Zhang-yi)

李章懿 a

Li Chao-liang (Li Zhao-liang)

李昭亮 a

Li K'o-yung (Li Ke-yong)

李克用 a

Li Ming-te (Li Ming-de)

李明德 a, b, c

Li Ti (Li Di)

李迪 a

Li Ts'un-shen (Li Cun-shen)

李存審 a

Li Yü (Li Yu)

李煜 a

Li Yüan-te (Li Yuan-de)

李元德 a

Li Yung-ho (Li Yong-he)

李用和 a

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Liao (Liao)

遼 a

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liu-shang (liu-shang)

六尚 a

Liu-shih (Liu-shi)

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mei-jen (mei-ren)
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Meng-shih (Meng-shi)
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米芾 a
Miao-shih (Miao-shi)
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Ming (Ming)
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P'ei Yü (Pei Yu)
裴愈 a
Po-shih (Bo-shi)
白氏 a
san-ssu (san-si)
三司 a
san-ts'ung (san-cong)
三從 a
Shan-si (Shan-xi)
陝西 a
Shang (Shang)
商 a
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尙儀 a, b
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尙書令 a
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Shih Pao-chi (Shi Bao-ji)

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Shih Shou-hsin (Shi Shou-xin)

石守信 a

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ssu-chang (si-zhang)

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ssu-chen (si-zhen)

司珍 a, b

ssu-cheng (si-zheng)

司正 a, b

ssu-chi (si-ji)

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司計 a, b

司籍 a, b

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司製 a, b

ssu-ch'ih (si-chi)

司譯 a, b

ssu-i (si-yi)

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司馬 a

Ssu-ma Kuang (Si-ma Guang)

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ssu-pao (si-bao)

司寶 a, b

ssu-pin (si-bin)

司賓 a, b

ssu-pu (si-bu)

司簿 a, b

ssu-shan (si-shan)

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太儀 a, b

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太保 a

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典記 a, b

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 典綵 a, b
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